

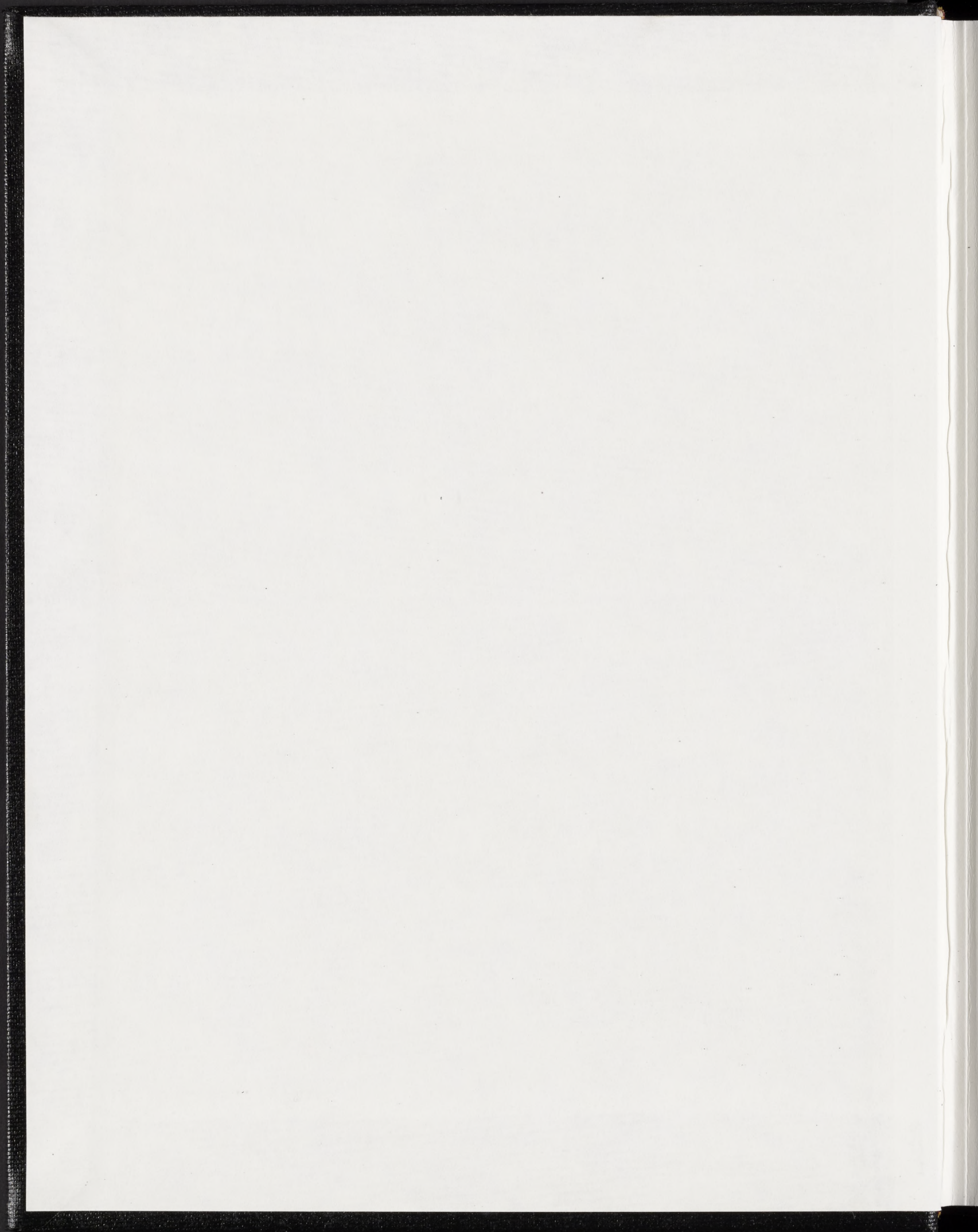
JAMES H. MEYER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
ELMER LEARN

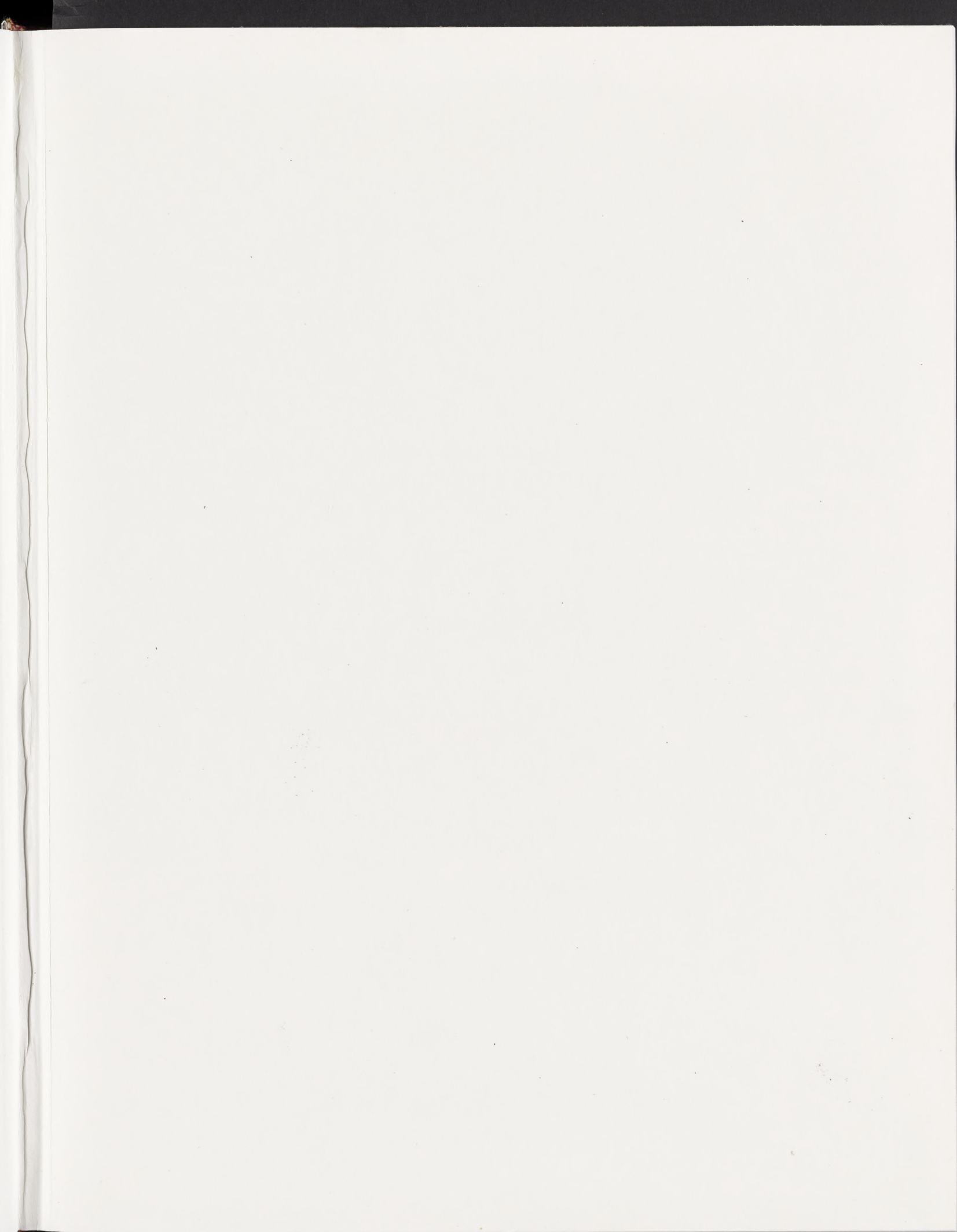
February 3 & 10, 1993

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA











James H. Hogue Oral History Project  
University of California, Davis

Oral History Interview

with

EDNA LEARN

Executive Vice Chancellor  
1969-1984

February 3 and February 10, 1993  
Davis, California

By Susan F. Douglas  
California State University, Sacramento



## PREFACE

The James H. Meyer Oral History Project was planned to provide the University of California, Davis with a history of the changes in the campus under Chancellor James H. Meyer's leadership from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s. In the fall of 1991, John Skarstad, Acting Head of the Department of Special Collections of the General Library, invited Dr. Jacqueline J. Reimer, Director of the Oral History Program, California State University, Sacramento, to begin the project. James H. Meyer Oral History Project, a research Associate and graduate student at CSUS, is working on the project and individuals involved in the administration of the project.

James H. Meyer Oral History Project  
University of California, Davis

Douglas developed a plan to write records and worked closely with John Skarstad to develop interview tapes. As the project progressed, Skarstad and Douglas decided a more complete picture of the history of UC-D could be obtained by including a brief description of the history of UC-D in the oral history interview.

Oral History Interview

with

Each interview was completed a brief description of the history of UC-D was given the opportunity to review the interview and final recordings were edited by Douglas before archiving.

**ELMER LEARN**

Executive Vice Chancellor  
1969-1984

The original tapes, transcripts, and production materials are located in the Department of Special Collections of the General Library at the University of California, Davis. The original tapes and transcripts, as well as the working transcripts, are also located in the Department of Special Collections of the University of California, Sacramento.

February 3 and February 10, 1993  
Davis, California

By Susan E. Douglass  
California State University, Sacramento





## PREFACE

The James H. Meyer Oral History Project was planned to provide the University of California, Davis with a history of the changes in the campus under Chancellor James H. Meyer's leadership from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s. In the fall of 1991, John Skarstad, Acting Head of the Department of Special Collections of the General Library, contacted Dr. Jacqueline S. Reinier, Director of the Oral History Program, Center for California Studies at California State University, Sacramento to begin the project. Dr. Reinier hired Susan Douglass, a Research Associate and graduate student in the Capital Campus Public History Program at CSUS, to conduct interviews with Chancellor Emeritus Meyer and individuals involved in the administration of the campus.

Douglass conducted research in written records and worked closely with John Skarstad to develop interview topics. As the project progressed, Skarstad and Douglass decided a more complete picture of the history of UCD could be obtained by including a brief discussion of the narrators' full career in addition to the core discussion topics.

Each interviewee completed a biographical questionnaire. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review their typed transcripts, and final transcripts were edited by Douglass before binding.

The original tapes, copies of the bound transcripts and production materials are located in the Department of Special Collections in the General Library at the University of California, Davis. In addition, copies of the tapes and transcripts, as well as the working transcripts, are located in the Oral History Collection in the University Archives, The Library, California State University, Sacramento.







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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

These interview sessions with Elmer Learn, the former executive vice chancellor, are the third in a series of interviews that will compose the James H. Meyer Oral History Project and provide a history of the University of California, Davis. The focus of this project is major themes in the development, expansion, and organization of campus programs under Chancellor Meyer's leadership. In addition to focusing on the period of Dr. Meyer's chancellorship, 1969-1987, these interview sessions with Dr. Learn include his family and educational background as well as his experiences at the University of Minnesota prior to coming to UC Davis.

The interviewer, Susan Douglass, met with Dr. Learn for a preliminary interview to discuss the project. The interviews were conducted at his home in Davis. After the interviews, Dr. Learn reviewed the transcript making some minor changes, largely to clarify information. He did not make any major changes in the content of the transcript.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Elmer Learn was born in Sayre, Pennsylvania in 1929 and grew up in nearby Dushore. He attended public schools in Dushore, continuing his education at Pennsylvania State University. At Penn State he received his B.S. (1950) and M.S. (1951) in agricultural economics. From 1951 until 1953 Learn served in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps. After completing his time in the service, Learn continued his education in agricultural economics, receiving his Ph.D. at Penn State in 1957. While working towards his Ph.D. Learn spent 1954-1955 at the University of Minnesota studying statistics and econometrics.

After completing his degree in 1957, Learn married Arlene Green and moved to Minnesota to teach at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Agricultural Economics. Learn moved into campus administration when he accepted a position as assistant to the president in 1964. From 1964 until 1969 Learn held the positions of assistant to the president and coordinator of planning, and director of planning and executive assistant to the president.

Learn came to the University of California, Davis in 1969 to become the executive vice chancellor. He remained in that capacity until his retirement in 1984 when he returned to teaching in the agricultural economics department. He retired from teaching in 1992.

During his career, Learn was involved in many professional activities including serving as vice chair of the Policy and Planning Board, University of California/Government of Egypt-Agricultural Development Systems Project. He is also the author of numerous publications.



[Session 1, February 3, 1993]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

DOUGLASS: What I would like to do is begin with some background information.

LEARN: Where were you born?

LEARN: I was born in Sayre, Pennsylvania which is in the northeastern part of Pennsylvania on the New York border. My home town was actually Dushore which is forty miles away. The closest hospital was in Sayre.

DOUGLASS: Is that where you grew up?

LEARN: Yes. It was a very rural town. Dushore was the largest town in the county. It had about 740 residents. I lived there through high school, and left after high school, and have not returned.

DOUGLASS: What were the names of your parents?

LEARN: John Walter and Naomi Ruth [Warner] Learn. My father was a county agricultural extension agent working for [Pennsylvania] Penn State University.

DOUGLASS: What did your mother do?

LEARN: She had been a school teacher. She taught school during the war because of the general shortage, but she was a homemaker during most of her marriage.



DOUGLASS: Did you have siblings?

LEARN: I have an older brother [Jacob Learn] and sister [Elinor Learn Smalley], and a younger sister [Harriet Learn Slamp]. They are all living. My parents are both dead.

DOUGLASS: During that early period in your life before you went off to college who influenced you most?

LEARN: I suppose my parents more than anybody else. Obviously, some teachers stand out in my mind. But my parents were the main influence during that time. I also worked for a furniture dealer/undertaker, Holcomb & Sons, during high school, and the man, Vell C. Holcomb, I worked for had considerable influence on both my early work habits and that formative stage of my life.

DOUGLASS: What type of influence did he have on your work habits?

LEARN: Well, it turned out that the firm consisted of a father and three sons, Pierson, Vell C., and Richard. The father [Vell B.] was essentially retired, two of the sons were drafted, the only other employee died, and so I was the only worker Vell C. had left during the war. So, I assisted in my first embalming at age fourteen and learned a lot about dealing with bereaved families, about work habits. I would go to work after school for about two hours, and then I worked weekends and I was on call whenever we had a funeral. We handled about fifty funerals a year in a small town. I learned a great deal.



DOUGLASS: You mentioned that your parents were probably the greatest influence on you. How did they influence you, do you think?

LEARN: I think they had strong moral character. They imbued that in the children. We were not well-off, but we were a comfortable middle-income family. Certainly during the depression we were better off than most of the people in the community. Nevertheless, we were expected to work. I think I had my first job picking potatoes at about fifth grade. As I said, I worked then through high school assisting in the furniture store and undertaking establishment. Both parents were teetotalers--I did not imbibe until about age twenty-two--and expected us to behave ourselves and perform well in school. There was never any question as to whether or not I would go on to college. It was just taken for granted. Overall, I think they did a good job of setting the moral, ethical standards that I tried to live by most of my life. My mother was quite an avid church member. My father was. . . . I think he would consider himself a good Christian, but not necessarily a good church member. I got in trouble in my first catechism class and quit with no objections from my father.

DOUGLASS: Why did you get in trouble?

LEARN: I wanted to work on Saturday and the minister said it was more important that I go to catechism, so I worked. [Laughter] This was a Lutheran church--a rather conservative Lutheran church--and my father



essentially ceased being an active member while I was still in high school. That had some influence. My father died when I was a sophomore in college. His early death, I think, also had a significant influence on me.

DOUGLASS: How did it influence you?

LEARN: Well, among other things, he had wanted me to study agriculture. I decided I was going to be a school teacher, so I enrolled initially with a major in education, intending to become a math and science teacher.

DOUGLASS: Now this was at Pennsylvania State [University]? [It was a college then but the name was changed to University while I was in school.]\*

LEARN: Penn State. Yes. My father died of a sudden heart attack in the spring of my sophomore year. During that semester I also had my first education course which totally discouraged me. Because of the combination of that and his death I decided to switch to agriculture.

DOUGLASS: What about it discouraged you?

LEARN: Oh, it was very much on the philosophy of education, no practical knowledge. I suspect had I stayed in education I would have learned something more practical, but I decided that I was not interested in being a professional educator at the time. Then part of it was a

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\*Dr. Learn added the preceding bracketed material during his review of the draft transcript.



feeling of guilt that I had disappointed my father by not going into agriculture. I was a confused kid at the time and switched.

DOUGLASS: What did you end up studying?

LEARN: I initially went over to agronomy. That had been my father's major. I realized after a semester that I could not finish my undergraduate education in four years because I did not have all the prerequisites I needed, and heaven forbid that I should stay in college for more than four years. So, I looked around and it turned out if I went into [agricultural economics] ag econ I could finish in four years and meet all the requirements. I went into ag econ in the middle of my junior year, not so much because I had any great interest in economics, but because it was the one major in agriculture that I could complete in four years time. It's a lesson that I've used oftentimes in talking with students about their future careers. I think we force students into making a career choice much too early, frequently long before they're ready for it. And I think we place more emphasis upon the impact of the major on the ultimate vocational activity of the student than is in fact true. I consider myself a good example of that.

The other interesting thing that has influenced my life and influenced how I think about things, vocational agriculture was very big in high schools at the time I was going through. I was the only male student in high school who did not take vocational agriculture.



LEARN: As a result I was able to take advanced algebra; I was able to take a foreign language, which none of the students who were taking vocational agriculture could take.

DOUGLASS: Was this what is called an elective?

LEARN: Right.

DOUGLASS: You did not have to take vocational agriculture?

LEARN: You did not have to take it but most people did, assuming they were going to spend their careers in agriculture. It turns out, first of all, I had no problem satisfying the prerequisites to get into the university whereas several of my classmates did because of their inability to take math and inability to take foreign languages. Secondly, at least so far as I know, twenty years after graduation I was the only member of the high school class who still had any connection to agriculture. All the rest who had taken vocational agriculture had wound up doing something other than farming. I think it was a flaw in the educational process at the time, and it's still being continued to some extent in some parts of rural America. We're training people, we're putting them through an educational process inappropriate to the world in which they are going to live.

DOUGLASS: Your major was agricultural economics, is that correct?

LEARN: Yes.

DOUGLASS: Did you have a minor in addition to your major?



LEARN: As an undergraduate I did not have a minor. In my Ph.D. program my minors were general economics and statistics.

DOUGLASS: I want to talk to you about the Ph.D. program but before that you went on to get an M.S., is that correct?

LEARN: Yes.

DOUGLASS: Why did you decide to continue your education?

LEARN: That's an interesting question, too. In my senior year I had thought of following my father's career and becoming a county agent, but I had never learned to milk a cow, among other things. And I thought, one couldn't be an agricultural extension agent and not know how to milk a cow. I suppose I could have gone out and learned, but it really didn't seem like the career I was prepared for. I looked at other job opportunities. The one job offer I received was to get into a training program for a grain and feed cooperative. They offered me, as I recall, \$2,800 a year. The chair of my department thought that I should consider graduate school, which I had given absolutely no thought to at the time. He said I could get an assistantship that would pay me, if I remember, about \$100 a month. Also I learned I could become a counselor in the dormitory and get room and board which the two together amounted to \$2,200 - \$2,400 a year, close to what I could get if I went out and got a job. I didn't know for sure what I wanted to do, and so I decided to go on to graduate school and entered



the master's program, again, with no intentions of getting a Ph.D. at the time.

DOUGLASS: This was still in agricultural economics?

LEARN: This was in agricultural economics, yes. I had done quite well academically in economics. I don't believe I got anything less than an "A" in the major after I switched over. I did find it interesting, although I was not a scholar. I was what I call a competitor. I didn't like people getting grades higher than I got. But I didn't study for the sake of learning; I studied to get good grades. I am still a believer in the grading system because I think relatively few of us at that age learn for the sake of learning. We learn because it's required. We learn because of peer pressure. We learn because we're competitors. Maybe that's extending my own experience too far but in observing students now for forty years I think perhaps at least 80 percent of the students who get into university learn because of peer pressure, because of competition, not because they have a great love for learning. There may be 20 percent of our students in the latter category. But without grading I think the learning would be substantially less than it is.

DOUGLASS: So, that was a motivating reason for you?

LEARN: It was a very important motivating reason for me. Even through a master's program it was motivating for me. I equate my development



as "scholar," to the extent that I am a scholar, as occurring sometime during my Ph.D. program. Somehow I got turned on to the desire to learn, and I became critical of what was written, whether it was in a textbook or in a newspaper. Up until then I had treated things that were in print largely as received fact.

DOUGLASS: Why do you think you made that transition?

LEARN: I suspect a kind of maturation. I had two years out for the service between my master's and Ph.D. First of all that was a very broadening experience for me.

DOUGLASS: What year did you finish your M.S.?

LEARN: I finished my bachelor's in June of '50; I finished the M.S. in August of '51, and I was drafted in September of '51.<sup>1</sup> I knew I was going into the service before I received my master's degree. This was during the Korean War period.<sup>2</sup>

DOUGLASS: Where did you serve?

LEARN: I did my basic training in Fort Riley, Kansas for about eighteen weeks and then I was transferred to Fort MacArthur, which is a small former coast artillery post that guarded the port of Los Angeles during World War I. I served in the Army Veterinary Corps there as a food

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<sup>1</sup>Learn received his B.S. in 1950 and his M.S. in 1951 in agricultural economics from Pennsylvania State University. He served in the U.S. Army as a corporal, 1951-1953.

<sup>2</sup>1950-1953.



inspector for the remainder of my tour, from roughly March of '51 to September of '53.

DOUGLASS: You mentioned that that was a broadening experience for you. What impact did that have on you?

LEARN: I realized, one time shortly after I arrived in Los Angeles, that here I was where nobody knew me; I could do almost anything I felt like and there was no one to report to my parents. I had never been in that situation before because even when I was at Penn State my father had lots of acquaintances there. So I was still kind of under surveillance, as it were, but when I was in Los Angeles I was on my own, completely. I was old enough to be on my own--I was twenty-two at the time--but I had never really been out from under family, peer pressure, that kind of thing.

I eventually left the post at Fort MacArthur and I was stationed at an outpost in Long Beach; I did food inspection at the port of Long Beach. There I got to know the docks and the longshoremen, and the gambling, theft, all the things that we equate with the docks. It was a real opener to a kid from the sticks of Pennsylvania to be caught in the middle of that. Even the basic training aspect of the army was an eye opener for me. I had been brought up to believe that if asked to do something, you did it, you didn't question. When I got in the army in basic training I realized that the assumption was you'd try to get out



of anything you were asked to do. It took me a while to learn that you don't volunteer. I was in one of the first integrated training platoons, and we had a large number of people from West Virginia, Kentucky, southern Ohio, both black and white, many of whom had not finished high school. We also had a very high percentage of college graduates. There was a mixture of people and their backgrounds and their talents. The kid in the bunk next to me was in the army as a way of getting out of jail because he had knifed somebody or something. We became close friends and I got to realize that there was a lot to life that I didn't know anything about. So, all that was broadening, and I guess, like most people, I have no regrets about my army experience, but I have no desire to repeat it.

DOUGLASS: When did you decide to go on with the Ph.D. program?

LEARN: Well, again, it was almost accidental. When I was approaching my discharge date, I had written to the head of the department asking him if he was aware of any job opportunities that might be available on the West Coast. I kind of liked California and I had gotten to know a girl that I wanted to stay near to out here. When he wrote back all he talked about was an opportunity to come back and get my Ph.D.

DOUGLASS: What was his name?

LEARN: It was Dr. M. E. John. He was a rural sociologist. I had known him since high school. My father knew him. He used to kid me a lot



about coming from the sticks and so forth. He was a good friend, but, obviously, he thought I should come back and work on a Ph.D. He said if I came back--I got out too late to start in the fall semester--he would give me a job as an instructor--research activity--during the fall semester and then I could start in the winter semester. My major advisor, who had been my advisor as an undergrad and also in the master's, was willing to serve as my major advisor. His name was George Brandow. He was one of the most influential people in my life.

DOUGLASS: How did he influence you?

LEARN: Oh, just his overall role as a teacher. I took courses from him, both as an undergrad and as a grad student. He was a role model, very influential, very dedicated, very disciplined. I suppose he taught me more about writing than all the other teachers I ever had combined. He had taken his English, I think, from the [William] Strunk [Jr.] of Strunk and White,<sup>1</sup> and, oh, just--I was going to say terrible--a very rigorous taskmaster. Six drafts of a paper were nothing to him. It was just that constant writing, rewriting, critique, rewrite, that I think helped me develop some ability to write and to speak.

DOUGLASS: Your relationship then continued with him as an undergrad and then as a graduate student?

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<sup>1</sup>William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, The Elements of Style.



LEARN: All through my graduate work. He did not want me to come back to Penn State. He wanted me to go elsewhere. He had received all his degrees from Cornell [University] and he thought that was a mistake and you should go elsewhere. In fact, he wanted me to apply to Harvard [University], and I just thought Harvard was beyond me, I wouldn't be able to cut it. But he took me on when I came back. But he did insist that I go away, and that's how I wound up in Minnesota in '54-'55.

DOUGLASS: Why did you decide to continue with the Ph.D.?

LEARN: I didn't have a job. I didn't have any promising prospects of one although I hadn't looked very hard and, again, I suppose partly the competitiveness; if I didn't try it I would never know whether I could make it or not. I had been a reasonably good student. I had been able to hold my own against Ph.D. candidates during my master's, although Penn State at the time was not considered to have a particularly strong Ph.D. program. It was, I suppose, the challenge more than anything else. Again, I wasn't a scholar. I didn't have that drive to learn. I had that desire to test myself, could I do it?

DOUGLASS: I want to come back to that transition because we went off on a tangent. You were talking about the reasons why you think you made that transition. One was maturity from having the desire to make good



grades to the desire to learn. Were there any other reasons why you made that transition?

LEARN: I think it simply was the atmosphere that you're put in as a Ph.D. candidate. The interaction with other students. The interaction with the faculty. Although Penn State was not as informal a department as some that I've known, you still felt more like a colleague of the faculty. You were treated more as a colleague than as a student kind of thing. I guess it's the nature of the program of work that we did.

As I say, Brandow encouraged me to go elsewhere and I wound up at [University of] Minnesota primarily because the other major academic influence on my life, a man by the name of Willard Cochrane, had been at Penn State when I got my master's. He left in '52 to go to Minnesota and he had a project--I believe it was long-run demand and supply for food in the United States--he was working on and was willing to offer me a research assistantship knowing full well that I was only going to be there a year. Minnesota had some programs in statistics and econometrics that I could not get at Penn State, so I elected to go to Minnesota.

DOUGLASS: This was when?

LEARN: The fall of '54 and the spring of '55. Minnesota, at the time, had a superb economics department and a very strong ag econ department. While it was not on a par, let's say, with Harvard, it was the "big



time" by comparison with my image of Penn State at that time. I was kind of amazed that I was able to go there and hold my own with the big boys. I had an excellent teacher [Les Hurwitz] in both statistics and econometrics and learned a great deal. It was during that period that I think I finally started to become a scholar, to seek understanding for the sake of getting understanding rather than for the sake of getting grades.

DOUGLASS: Now you returned to Penn State, . . .

LEARN: . . . Then I came back to Penn State . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . Finished your Ph.D. . . .

LEARN: . . . In the summer of '55.

DOUGLASS: When did you finish your Ph.D.?

LEARN: I finished my thesis and took my final oral exam for the Ph.D. in September of 1956.

DOUGLASS: What was the subject of your thesis?

LEARN: The subject was farm level demand for livestock products. A paper based upon my research won a graduate student award from the American Farm Economics Association<sup>1</sup>.

The month of September, 1956 proved to be very eventful. I met Arlene [Green Learn] who is my wife. Well, I had known her before and we became reacquainted in the '55-'56 school year. In the

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<sup>1</sup>Now the American Agricultural Economics Association.



winter of '56 we began dating and during the summer decided to get married. I was going to go to Minnesota and come back and graduate in January and we would get married then. On Labor Day weekend we decided, "Why wait?" And so I took my Ph.D. oral exam on a Wednesday, we were married on Saturday, and I showed up for work in Minnesota on the following Wednesday.

DOUGLASS: My gosh! [Laughter]

LEARN: [Laughter] It was an interesting week.

DOUGLASS: Did you plan to teach?

LEARN: I hadn't. What happened [was] I came back to Penn State to work on my degree and was looking around at job opportunities. Willard Cochrane, again, from Minnesota said he had a major project [Expanding the Demand for Food in the U.S.] that he was working on; he'd like to have me come back and participate in it. He also indicated that another faculty member at Minnesota would be retiring the next year and there was a good chance I would be considered as a permanent replacement.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

DOUGLASS: You were talking about going into the teaching profession. I asked you had you planned to go into teaching.



LEARN: No, I hadn't. He [Willard Cochrane] wanted me to come back and work on this project. He would give me what was then known as a research associate position, and he had talked with O. B. Jesness the department head about considering me as a replacement for a gentlemen who would be retiring in 1957. This professor was the major statistician in the department. If I could come back and start out in the research position, the chances of my being hired for a permanent teaching/research position were very good. I liked Minnesota. I had enjoyed my year there. I enjoyed Willard Cochrane very much. So, I said, "Yes. I'd come back and try that." I was hired to be a full time research associate.

Toward the end of the fall quarter the gentleman [Percy Lowe], who taught the beginning economics courses in the department, died, and they needed some replacements for him in the winter, and so I was asked to teach a beginning course in economics for home economists. My first appearance in a classroom as a teacher was early January of 1957 in front of sixty-seven sophomore home economists, all of whom hated economics and knew they were going to hate this course. I had never lectured before in my life.

DOUGLASS: You had not done any teaching while you were at Penn State?



LEARN: I don't know that we had any teaching assistantships at Penn State when I was there in ag econ. All the assistantships were research. And so I had never even been asked to substitute as a lecturer.

DOUGLASS: This was trial by fire?

LEARN: Trial by fire with absolutely no training, no preparation of any kind in teaching.

DOUGLASS: How did you like it?

LEARN: I liked it. This course had a horrible reputation. It was a required course for home economists. They disliked it thoroughly. I more or less told myself that by the end of this quarter there's going to be at least ten people in this class who are going to know some economics and are going to like it. Over time I got to know who were the better students, and I kind of taught to them. I found that I enjoyed lecturing. I enjoyed the challenge. I learned a lot of economics that year. Then during that quarter, I think, the offer to stay on as an assistant professor came through.

DOUGLASS: What year is this?

LEARN: 1957. In the fall and winter of '57-'58 I taught a beginning course in agricultural prices and I taught beginning and intermediate courses in statistics. From '57 through the spring of '64 I taught, as I recall, three courses a year.



DOUGLASS: Now in 1964 you became assistant to the president, moving from an academic position into an administrative one. In reading a speech you gave at the faculty development workshop at UC [University of California] Davis in 1984,<sup>1</sup> I noticed that you remarked that you had turned down the position twice but finally decided to accept it after deciding that it was in your and the University of Minnesota's interest to do so. Why did you decide to accept the position?

LEARN: Maybe I should go back one year before that.

DOUGLASS: All right.

LEARN: The head of our department had become dean and we were searching for a new department head, and a couple of people came and asked me if I was interested. I said, "No. First of all, I'm too young and secondly, I'm not sure I want to be an administrator."

DOUGLASS: Why did they come to you?

LEARN: I don't know. I guess I was looked upon as one who spoke out on issues and they thought maybe I could become a leader of the department. I don't know for sure.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: And so, I did not apply. The committee got down to interviewing outside candidates and came back to me again and asked if I would

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<sup>1</sup>Elmer Learn, "Confessions of An Old, New-Faculty Member," paper presented at Faculty Development Workshop, UC Davis, April 20, 1984.



consider myself as a candidate. Then, I was not overly fond of the leading candidates from outside and decided that if it's a choice between working under one of them or being in charge myself, I prefer to be in charge, so I consented to be a candidate and I was selected.

DOUGLASS: Was that the main reason that you made that decision?

LEARN: Yes. I think that was the main reason. I'd done some work in Europe in 1960. Then in 1962, primarily as a result of Willard Cochrane being in Washington [D.C.], I studied the impact of the European Economic Community on American agriculture in a consulting arrangement for USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]. This gave me some notoriety, I guess, within the profession. I had opportunities to give lectures at various institutions around the country. I kind of felt like my career was taking off and I preferred to stay with that rather than become an administrator because I knew I could not do all the things that I had been doing and also be head of the department. But I was selected to head the department and stayed on.

Then the following summer the man who had been assistant to the president was coming back to head agricultural extension. He called me up one day and said that he was leaving over there and the president [O. Meredith Wilson] would like me to be his replacement.

DOUGLASS: What was the name of this man?



LEARN: This was Luther Pickrel--P-i-c-k-r-e-l. He and I had been very good friends. I had done a lot of extension work for him when I was a professor. I said, "Look, the president doesn't even know who I am. You're the one who wants me." He said, "No. I talked with him about it, he really knows and wants you. He wants someone from agriculture and he thinks you're the one who can do it." Well, I said, "I've only been department head for a year. That would disrupt the department." [Pickrel said,] "Well, he understands that. But he wants you." And I said, "No, I think I'd better prove I'm capable of being a department head before I go on to something else." So, it died down. A couple of weeks later Pickrel and the dean wanted to have lunch with me. And the dean said, "Agriculture really needs somebody in the president's office and we'd like you to go." Pickrel repeated the fact that the president wanted me.

DOUGLASS: What was the president's name?

LEARN: O. Meredith Wilson. He's the third major academic influence in my life after Brandow, Cochrane.

DOUGLASS: Why did he want someone from agriculture in that position?

LEARN: Well, first of all, agriculture is politically very important in all the midwestern land-grant universities. He was not an agriculturist; he was an historian. But he had an appreciation of the importance of agriculture. Agriculture was also somewhat remote from the rest of



the campus. The main part of the university was in Minneapolis.

Agriculture was in St. Paul, a few miles distant. And agriculture felt they had what I referred to as an inferiority complex, and they felt they needed somebody over in the President's Office who understood them. I struggled with the offer and, as I said in that speech, I finally came to the conclusion that I was working for the university. As an employee of the university I had an obligation to go where the university thought I would be most valuable. My advice to any young faculty member today would be that's the wrong reason to take a job. I don't regret having taken it, but I regret taking it for the reasons I did. I should have taken it because it was what I wanted to do, not because it was what I thought the university wanted me to do.

Anyhow, that's how I wound up in administration.

DOUGLASS: What was your main responsibility in that position?

LEARN: Well, it started out, interestingly enough, Met--his first name was Meredith but he went by Met--never gave me any instructions. I got some help from Pickrel as to what I was supposed to do. It was essentially to serve as the president's chief aide. I read all the mail that came into the president's office. In many cases I would refer it to one of the vice presidents, or in other cases I would draft a proposed response. In some cases I'd go in and discuss it with the president. I more or less oversaw the staffing of the office. There was a young



woman who was the chief secretary--personal secretary--to the president who did most of the day-to-day supervision of the receptionist and the other secretaries in the office. But she would clear with me the hiring of any new people and any disciplinary problems and things of that nature. So, fundamentally it was to be an extension of the president.

DOUGLASS: How big was the campus at that time?

LEARN: About 35,000 to 40,000 students.

DOUGLASS: It was large even then.

LEARN: It was a large campus. Yes. It grew a little bit during the time I was there although it leveled out. It grew to about 45,000, I think, when I left. I don't think it ever got much larger than that. I prepared a paper one time for the president on planning for a campus of 60,000. Thank God, it never got to that.

DOUGLASS: Within a year, this is 1965, your title became assistant to the president and coordinator of planning.

LEARN: Right.

DOUGLASS: What effect did that have on your responsibilities?

LEARN: What the president wanted was to get some meaningful focus on overall academic and physical planning of the university. Historically that responsibility had been handled by the vice president for business and finance and he wanted more academic input into planning than



they had had in the past. He was also concerned about where the university was going, and that led to this 60,000 figure. So, in February or March of '65 he said, "I want you to develop a process for planning." That was about the extent of the instructions I had. So, we created the title coordinator of planning. It wasn't to be a "czar," it was to be a truly a coordinator rather than a director.

DOUGLASS: Had you done any planning before?

LEARN: No. No. It was kind of learning by doing. The first assignment I took on was parking, transportation and circulation. We had a horrible parking problem. We had the need for about 25,000 parking spaces and we had about 15,000. It was run largely by the police department. It was unplanned. When a vacant space showed up they made a parking lot. If they had to build a building on it they lost the parking lot. We had no plans for circulation of automobiles. Congestion around the university was very serious.

DOUGLASS: That was the first big issue then?

LEARN: We started on that. Then that same year the dean of medicine and the director of hospitals came in to see the president and said that they needed to have some planning for the future development of the medical school. I don't know who proposed this, but we wound up saying we should not plan the medical school in isolation. What we should do is plan for the health sciences generally. One aspect of that



I remember very vividly. I said, "Well, that should include pharmacy." Well, pharmacy had never had any association with the medical school. It was in an entirely different part of the campus. I remember the dean saying, "Why would you want the pharmacists in there. They're nothing but a bunch of damn chemists." And I said, "Well, it seems to me that they're an integral part of the total practice of medicine, and if we're going to plan we should plan pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, medicine, all of these things together." The president agreed, and so we created a planning committee for the health sciences. I chaired the committee which led to a massive, bureaucratic thing. But that got me started in the health sciences.

DOUGLASS: That's interesting that you had that background at Minnesota.

LEARN: Yes. It started there. I'm reasonably proud of the fact that we wound up developing a master plan for facility development that was approved by the legislature in the year I left [1969]. It was for one hundred million dollars which at that time was a lot of money. One hundred million dollars development and it appeared we were going to get approval from NIH [National Institutes of Health] in Washington [D.C.] to support it, and in fact they did. The university hasn't completed the development that we laid out in '69, but they've made major strides towards completion of it. From what I can tell they



pretty much followed the plan that we developed in that four to five year period, from 1965 to 1969.

DOUGLASS: What was the main challenge, if you can identify one, in that effort to coordinate the health sciences?

LEARN: Getting the school of medicine to accept the fact that other aspects of the health sciences deserved consideration if not on a par with at least simultaneous with the consideration of the needs of medicine.

DOUGLASS: How did you do that?

LEARN: I'm not quite sure. First of all, we created this massive committee structure. We had an overall committee of fifteen appointed people that included the dean of nursing, the dean of pharmacy, the dean of dentistry, the dean of medicine, the director of hospitals, and then a number of faculty members. So, they were forced to talk to one another. They were forced to see one another's plans and objectives. We then created a whole array of subcommittees dealing with specific aspects, and we tried always to mix up faculty from the school of medicine, dentistry, and so forth, so that the medical faculty began to gain appreciation for the fact that dentists need some basic science training not greatly dissimilar from that which doctors get. I don't think we ever totally succeeded in breaking down the pecking order that exists within the health sciences, but I think we did succeed in forcing the university at all levels to look at the health sciences as a



totality rather than as dealing with medicine independent of dentistry, independent of pharmacy, independent of veterinary medicine, and so forth.

I think the other thing was that when we began to develop facilities we did it in a rational way that required an ordering that, strangely enough, led to the development of facilities for dentistry and the basic sciences ahead of clinical medicine. In the accepted "pecking order" clinical medicine would always come first. Well, you couldn't develop the clinical medicine facilities until you got dentistry out of the way. You couldn't get dentistry out of the way until you'd done something for the basic sciences. So, I guess that's how we did it. Kind of by trial and error and fire, and a group of really quite outstanding leaders. They brought the rest of the faculty along.

DOUGLASS: Was this coordination of the health sciences what dominated your time while you were at Minnesota?

LEARN: I would guess it occupied between 10 and 20 percent of my time from roughly '66 to '69.

DOUGLASS: Did you teach at all during this time?

LEARN: That's an interesting question. I tried teaching. I taught a course that Willard Cochrane and I had taught jointly and then he went to Washington [D.C.] and I taught it alone. It was a graduate course in agricultural policy. I agreed to come back in the spring of '65 and



teach that course, and midway through the course it dawned on me that I was doing an absolutely lousy job. I swore I would never again return to the classroom until I was able to devote the time that teaching deserves. I could not order my priorities in such a way that I could do the reading that was necessary to do a good job teaching. Now partly that was a function of the position I was in, partly I think it's my own nature, partly I think it's the nature of administration. In administration you don't control your time. Somebody else does. Particularly that's the case if you're a staff member to somebody else, which I was. I had to do what the job required. Let me illustrate. I couldn't understand when I first went to work for Met Wilson why he permitted me to keep his calendar. I and his receptionist made all the calendar decisions, or virtually all of them, and I couldn't understand that. [I thought] this guy is no leader. A leader would handle his own calendar. Well, it didn't take me long to realize that there's no way that can be done. A calendar becomes almost a self-perpetuating monster. You can give guidelines as to what's important and what isn't, but the person in that position who tries to control his own calendar is wasting time. The calendar controls him.

DOUGLASS: Then, in terms of controlling time, the calendar represents the outside forces?



LEARN: The issues that you deal with are the issues that come to your table, I guess, or to your desk, that can't be shoved off on somebody else.

Obviously, a lot of things that people wanted to see the president about either I would handle or I would refer them to the vice president or somebody else who could handle them, but there are some things that only the president can handle. It was partly my responsibility, with the guidance and the assistance of the president, to decide what they were and then to find the time to put them on the calendar. Over time we developed a very smooth handling of the calendar in which he had virtually very little input. If he agreed to a meeting, he'd come and tell me or tell the receptionist and put it on. Or if he had a trip out of town, obviously we'd have to provide time for it. But other than that, the details of how he spent his day were dictated pretty much by the nature of the issues at hand. That lesson served me very well, I think. I learned from him not to try to control my calendar.

At Davis, if somebody said, "Can I see you?" I'd say, "See Joye [White]. She can tell you whether you can see me or not." If I start making the appointments, Joye and I are simply not going to get along. Then sometimes I'd say, "If so and so calls, I have to see him; get him on. If so and so calls, I don't want to see him. Shove him off to somebody else."



DOUGLASS: Before you actually left the University of Minnesota I noticed that your job title changed one more time and you became director of planning and then executive assistant. What did that mean exactly in terms of your responsibilities?

LEARN: It didn't really mean anything very much. It related in part to a reorganization of the entire president's office. President Wilson left in '67 and the new president, Malcolm Moos, created two new vice presidencies, a vice president of administration and a vice president for student affairs. At the same time we did that we modified my title to give planning a higher level of visibility than it had received and to give my position a little bit [more status]; the executive assistant sounded less like a briefcase toter than does assistant to the president.

The other thing that occurred during that period that started in '66 was we became very concerned about the surrounding area of the university. I became the major spokesman for meeting with neighborhood planning groups, for meeting with the city planning commission, for meeting with various individuals involved with the planning of highways, neighborhood renewal, business activities, etc. I got involved in the consolidation of the university laboratory high school and Marshall High School, which was the neighborhood high school in the area. I got involved in major planning of new highway development through the university. We began to try to work on



urban renewal on the west bank of the Mississippi [River], and I got involved in that. This new title gave me, presumably, a little more status than I otherwise would have had.

The organizational structure at Minnesota was interesting. I had essentially no staff or organization in my office. Starting in '65 I did hire an architect who was called the university planner. Over time I think his office included about five people. But we still operated pretty much under the philosophy that the coordinator of planning was a staff role to the president. My job was to coordinate, not to direct. We tried to live by that. The director thing may have been my ego showing, but I think it was more to overcome some of the resistant elements in the university who did not want to become involved in laying out to the president's office what they were intending to do. And this was just to put some muscle into that.

DOUGLASS: You came to UC Davis in 1969. How did you get offered the position of executive vice chancellor?

LEARN: This is an interesting story. Minnesota was going through some difficult times in the spring of '69.

DOUGLASS: What were those difficulties?

LEARN: Well, a variety of things. The new president, President Moos, was not nearly as strong an individual as President Wilson had been. He and I got along very well. He gave me much more authority than I had had



under President Wilson. But I disagreed with some of the things he was doing, and there were problems with the vice president of business and finance. In fact, at the time he was interviewing Hale Champion who had been [Governor Edmund G.] Pat Brown's director of finance for the position of vice president for business. In fact, Hale Champion was in my office when the phone rang and it turned out to be [Chester O.] Chet McCorkle [Jr.] at Davis. He said, "I've been asked to call and see if you would be interested in being considered as dean of the College of Agriculture at Davis."

DOUGLASS: How did they identify you?

LEARN: So far as I know, Alex McCalla had given my name. He had been my graduate student in Minnesota. He was here [UCD] on the faculty. I had met Chet at a meeting in Chicago a year earlier. But I think Alex and maybe others on the faculty had suggested my name.

In any case I didn't hesitate; I simply said, "Yes." Chet said he'd never heard a response so quick. The interesting thing is Arlene and I had been talking and I said, "I've got to get out of here." The question was do I go back into the department or do I go somewhere else. There were really very few universities that I was interested in. I considered only a few where I thought if somebody asked me I would seriously look. I had been offered positions but had turned them down.



DOUGLASS: Were these administrative positions?

LEARN: Yes. In '66 I had been offered a deanship at Cornell--or I had not been offered, I was a candidate.

DOUGLASS: Was this in agriculture?

LEARN: No. This was in home economics, of all things.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

[Interruption]

DOUGLASS: You were talking about how Hale Champion was visiting and Chet McCorkle had called and asked you about the deanship and you responded "Yes" immediately. You had been thinking about possibly moving into another position anyway.

LEARN: Yes. I had pretty much made up my mind that I had probably spent as long as I should as an assistant to the president and I either should move to another administrative position or I should go back to teaching and research.

DOUGLASS: When did Chet McCorkle call you?

LEARN: This would have been in April of 1969.

DOUGLASS: Dr. [James H.] Meyer was acting chancellor at that point.

LEARN: He had been named as chancellor. I don't know whether he was officially acting [chancellor] but anyhow he was behaving as the chancellor.



DOUGLASS: I believe that in April because of everything that was going on in terms of student activism he was asked to be acting chancellor.

LEARN: He was in the process of hiring his team of administrators. So, I said, "Yes."

DOUGLASS: What was Chet McCorkle's title at that time?

LEARN: Chet was vice chancellor for academic affairs. He knew that he was not going to continue in that position. I assume that Chancellor Meyer had asked him to call me because Chet knew me and he was also an ag economist. I don't think it was on that call, but shortly thereafter I made arrangements to come out here for a visit. So I came out as a potential candidate for Dean of Agriculture. One of the interesting things I was thinking about as I prepared for this interview was, all of this was done before the days of affirmative action, so there was no widespread advertising search.

I came out, as I recall, on a Sunday and on Monday I met with Chancellor Meyer and Lorena [Herrig]. They had set up interviews with most of the department chairs in agriculture. There was an interview with students. I had an interview with the members of the agricultural economics department. This was quite a grueling two days of meeting with people and discussing agriculture, and Davis versus Minnesota, and so forth. As I recall, it was during the last meeting with the chancellor that he commented, "We've been looking



over your background and you may be interested in two other positions open here. There's a vice chancellor for academic affairs and executive vice chancellor position that we're creating, you might be interested in one of those." And I said, "Well, in terms of what I've been doing for the last five years, I'm probably better equipped for a vice chancellor position than I am for a dean's position. I don't know anything about agriculture in California except that I know it's vastly different from anything that I've experienced before. I have been working on the health sciences. I've been working on legislative representation, on community planning and things of that nature, which I gather are related to what you have in mind for executive vice chancellor." And so we talked some more about that. I don't remember whether we left it that I would be the candidate for executive vice chancellor. I think we did.

DOUGLASS: Dr. Meyer brought this up with you then at the end of your two days that you were here having gone through all these meetings, etc., with people in agriculture?

LEARN: Right. I remember it was an eventful time because the next day I went down to Stanford [University] where Meredith Wilson was. I wanted to chat with him about his advice on it. That was the day that a student was killed in a demonstration at Berkeley.

DOUGLASS: This was May then.



LEARN: May of '69. Yes.

DOUGLASS: This was People's Park.<sup>1</sup>

LEARN: That Saturday was when the students gathered at Davis and marched over to Sacramento.<sup>2</sup> I was home watching television news that Saturday night and here came [Governor] Ronald Reagan on the screen talking about this chancellor at Davis that had been encouraging students in this activity and how terrible it was. I remember saying to Arlene, "Well, that takes care of that job. The guy who could hire me isn't even going to be around [Laughter] to be inaugurated let alone hire somebody." But nothing more came of that.

About two weeks later, as I remember, Chancellor Meyer called and said that he'd like me to come back, and to bring my wife and visit. Chances looked very good that they would be offering me the position of executive vice chancellor subject to approval by the regents. So we came back in June [1969] for two days. I think it was then that he told me he was going to submit my name. He submitted it in July and I came in August.

DOUGLASS: This was a new position, was it not?

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<sup>1</sup>The protest over People's Park occurred May 15 through 25, 1969.

<sup>2</sup>On May 26, 1969, ten thousand students peacefully marched on the Capitol in Sacramento to confront Governor Reagan and the legislature and protest the actions at UC Berkeley.



LEARN: This was a new position. It had not existed before. I'm not sure that the chancellor had made firm decisions about just what responsibilities the new position would entail. I think that was good in a lot of ways because as we got to know each other in those first couple of months, I think the division of responsibilities more or less evolved based upon our mutual interests and our working relationship. I think at the time he was thinking of restoring the position of special assistant for the health sciences that [Chancellor] Emil Mrak had had, and he decided not to do that and that I would take on coordination of health science activities, for example.

DOUGLASS: I just want to return for a moment to this period when you were coming out here, before you actually accepted the position, and there was student activism going on and you did hear what Governor Reagan had to say. He also was quoted as saying that he thought Meyer's position with the students was "sickening." Besides what you just mentioned regarding that Dr. Meyer probably wouldn't even be chancellor, did you have any other reactions to that?

LEARN: No. I had been aware of student activism in California from the first '65 eruption.

DOUGLASS: Had much been happening at Minnesota?

LEARN: Yes. We had the takeover of our administrative building in the spring of '69 and I was deep in the middle of that. So, I was familiar with it.



It was not on the scale of California's but student activism came with the territory at that time. I remember a regent [Edward W. Carter] asking me at lunch the day of my appointment, "Why would you want to come to California?" And I said, "Well, my perception of California is that California has been more supportive of higher education than any state in the Union, and if higher education goes down the tubes in California, it's not likely to survive any place. The Davis campus is young and vibrant and it sounds like an exciting place to be."

So, I was concerned about the student unrest, but it wasn't the dominant consideration. I think the more important thing for me was, first of all, I had spent five years in a staff capacity and my perception of administrative careers is that one should not stay too long in that type of position. Otherwise, you become labeled as staff and you never get line responsibilities, so the idea of having some so-called line responsibilities was important to me. The idea of coming to what was effectively a new campus--it's an old campus, but as you saw in one of the papers<sup>1</sup> I gave, it's an old new campus or a new old campus--it was growing rapidly, it was not set in its ways as Minnesota was. The opportunity of being part of that maturing of a campus was exciting to me.

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<sup>1</sup>Elmer Learn, "Remarks to the Accreditation Team," December 1, 1981.



DOUGLASS: Were there any other reasons besides those that you just mentioned?

LEARN: Well, one, I had made up my mind that it was time to leave my position at Minnesota, so some time within the next twelve months, after January 1969, I was going to have to make a decision. The thought of coming to California was appealing to me. The climate was attractive. The overall level of finance for higher education, despite the fact that it was declining, was still rich compared with what we had experienced at Minnesota. Davis was a good campus that fit my particular interests. It had a strong land-grant heritage to which I feel very committed. Administrative issues relating to the new medical school were something where I could take advantage of my experience at Minnesota over the previous five years. All that seemed to blend.

DOUGLASS: The chancellor and I tended to hit it off, I think, in terms of philosophy toward higher education and philosophy toward management, and that seemed exciting to me.

DOUGLASS: You said that when you came that you were not sure that Dr. Meyer was still thinking in terms of what your responsibilities would be. Is that correct?

LEARN: You'd have to talk to him about this, but my perception was that he and Mrs. Herrig had determined that they needed someone who would be responsible for overall day-to-day operation of the campus and that



this could not be assigned as it had been in the past to the vice chancellor of academic affairs. Even though he's a great believer in thin administration, he thought the size of the campus, the size of the administrative responsibilities, required a second person at the top level. But I don't think the specific duties or responsibilities of that office had been spelled out, in part because the chancellor himself had not assumed his responsibilities. So, we both more or less grew into the position, and our respective areas of emphasis kind of evolved as we worked with one another during the next year or so.

DOUGLASS: What was the first thing you did when you started in your new position as executive vice chancellor? Now, this is July of 1969, is that correct?

LEARN: August of '69.

DOUGLASS: Right. You officially began in August.

LEARN: You know, I can't remember. I recall the first week we were here I went to an orientation meeting--it was a banquet of some kind--for new medical and law students. I got involved early on in discussion of the need for a publication of some sort that would go out to alumni and parents and other constituencies to reassure them that the world was not falling apart.



We very early on got involved in ethnic studies and affirmative action--essentially enrollment of EOP [Equal Opportunity Program] students--and things of that nature.

DOUGLASS: When you talk about things falling apart, was this in response to student activism?

LEARN: Yes. It was, "Why don't you stand tough and take care of those outlaws who are burning buildings and destroying computers," and things of that nature. There was a great deal of concern and a lack of confidence in university administration generally. The chancellor got some of that, kind of a carry over of the Reagan attitude. Apparently there were many alumni who were very unhappy with him. He didn't stand up and put those people in jail or do this or that or the other.

DOUGLASS: What was the reason for focusing on affirmative action and ethnic study programs?

LEARN: Well, this was within a year of the assassination of [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] and of [Robert F.] Kennedy<sup>1</sup> and there was, I guess the best way to call it, a national knee jerk reaction that was not always well thought out in terms of enrolling minority students, in terms of providing courses that were perceived to be needed by them--ethnic studies programs and so forth. We had a Black Research and Service

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated April 4, 1968. Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated June 5, 1968.



Program. I noticed in the calendar<sup>1</sup> I had five or six meetings on simply trying to define what its role was, what its purpose was. I think we and a lot of other institutions made mistakes of enrolling students because they were the right color without regard to whether they could make it academically. I think we did them an injustice; we did the institution an injustice. A lot of this was groping for what was the appropriate answer to this social crisis that was upon us.

I remember one of the early budget issues I got into was that we enrolled a large a number of EOP students without projecting out what the four year cost of that was going to be. We looked at only one year cost. Well, in four years you have four cohorts of EOP students and we simply did not have the money to handle students at the volumes we were taking them into the EOP program. One of the early things we got into was trying to project that into the next four years and seeing how we could handle this or how did we adjust the size so that it would fit our resource availability.

DOUGLASS: How did you handle it?

LEARN: Well, we went down to [University of California] systemwide and had a long discussion with the people there about what the commitments were and they hadn't thought of it either in the four year term. Fortunately or unfortunately, one of the consequences of taking

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<sup>1</sup>Learn is referring to his calendar from that time.



students in without adequate assessment of their ability to stay was that we had a very heavy fallout--dropout--of these students, so that they did not progress in the way a normal expectation would be. We also readjusted some other parts of our budget so we didn't have to have a drastic reduction and so forth. We were able to take care of it in part because the total campus was growing so rapidly that [registration] reg fees were growing quite well and we were able to build that in. But that was an early lesson in budgeting that taught me a great deal. You can't plan for next year merely by looking at next year. You have to ask yourself what are the downstream costs of what you're going to do next year.

[Interruption]

DOUGLASS: We were talking about budget. One of your key responsibilities was the coordination of budget preparation allocations. You just mentioned one issue of dealing with EOP and allowing budget for that type of activity. How did you determine allocations?

LEARN: This was a learning experience for me also. At Minnesota I had had no direct responsibility for budget, although I did get involved in part of the presentation and representation of budget issues to the legislature, so I gained some feel for it. But the California process was so much more rigorous, so much more dictated by formula than was the case in Minnesota that I had a significant learning experience



to get involved with such things as student-faculty ratios, faculty [Full Time Employment] FTE and comparisons of that nature. For the most part, the allocations to the campus were carefully constrained by what were then known as budget control points. We got so much money for maintenance and operation of plant, so much money for faculty teaching position salaries, so much money for merit and promotion of faculty and for merit and promotion of staff. The area where we had meaningful say over allocation largely related to registration fee monies, that money that went to support student services. Now we did have to make determination of how many faculty positions, for example, would go to Agriculture and how many would go to Letters and Science and how many would go to Engineering. Chancellor Meyer kept his finger very closely on this matter at all times. He saw that as the most significant aspect of the implementation of academic plans.

DOUGLASS: You are referring to this control over positions?

LEARN: Over positions. On that he played the key role. That was the area of budget that he did not delegate. On all other aspects of budget, on the allocation of price increase money, on distribution of other types of funds, that was primarily my responsibility. And I must tell you in that first year I was guided pretty much by the technical people in the budget office, and we went pretty much by the books. I didn't know



enough to know about how to go about managing it otherwise except with regard to registration fees and even there, in the first years, I remember, we allocated pretty much in accordance with the way money had been allocated in the past. We got so much additional money because of additional students. It was more or less proportionate, not entirely. But we gradually began to evolve a much more rigorous approach to distribution of funds across the campus.

DOUGLASS: How did you develop that approach?

LEARN: I guess through experience, through a great deal of listening to complaints, of interaction between the chancellor and myself. I would say the one thing that I think distinguishes Davis, or distinguished Davis, from many other institutions was the close linkage between what we did in planning and what we did in budget. This gets back to how the chancellor and I evolved our relative areas of responsibility. He saw his major responsibility as guiding the planning process, trying to anticipate what problems were down the road, two or three or five or ten years, and laying out a set of priorities: where do we want to go as an institution? My job was to participate in that process and to ensure that when we allocated monies the dollars followed the same sort of priorities that we had laid out in the planning process.

DOUGLASS: How effective was that method?



LEARN: Let me give you an illustration. This was more than ten years down the road, but I think one of the best examples of the effectiveness was the fact that we were able, after the passage of Proposition 13<sup>1</sup> which was anticipated to have dire consequences, to proceed with the plans to start a new school of administration.

DOUGLASS: Despite the fact that Proposition 13 had passed?

LEARN: Despite the fact that Proposition 13 had passed, and we were able to do it without major opposition from the campus.

DOUGLASS: The School of Administration began in about 1980?

LEARN: About '79.

DOUGLASS: This was very soon after Proposition 13 passed, then.

LEARN: It started in '81.<sup>2</sup> In fact we had to make the decision, were we going to go ahead in the year [1978-1979] after Proposition 13 passed? Because we had linked budgetary planning with academic planning at the same time we were cutting some parts of the campus, we were able to make this decision to start a major new program that would have significant consequences for the use of funding in the future, to

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<sup>1</sup>Proposition 13, the initiative to amend the constitution, sponsored by Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann, limits property taxes to 1 percent of the assessed 1975 value and can rise only 2 percent each year after. Reassessment can only occur when the property is sold or improved. State and local governments cannot increase property taxes and other taxes can only be increased with a two-thirds vote. Voters approved Proposition 13 in June of 1978. The projected impact of the initiative was severe limitation of resources to cities, counties, and school districts.

<sup>2</sup>The School of Administration was established in 1981.



do it with confidence, and to do it with a general acceptance by the campus that it was the right thing to do. Now that's an unusual circumstance, I think, and I think it illustrates the extent to which we had evolved a philosophy that says we're going to make plans as rationally and as thoughtfully as we can about what this campus wants to be, what its sense of priorities is, and we're going to follow those plans then with budget. The tradition in most universities is to make plans, write them up in a big tome, put the tome on somebody's shelf, and point to it whenever somebody comes in and say, "This is our plan," but never refer to it except in that way.

DOUGLASS: Did this then provide a link between the plan and the reality of the budget?

LEARN: That's right. In our case, I think planning was a real, living, ongoing activity. The chancellor involved himself in planning not every five years but virtually every day of his career. In doing so he also made a requirement that our budget decisions evolved or derived from the planning work that had been done in advance.

The other thing that we did, and we followed quite religiously, was that our major budget effort was related not to what we are going to do with the money that we received this year, but it was our major budget effort, our major analytical effort in the budget process, to always relate to what we were going to do with the money that we



LEARN: anticipated receiving a year from now. So, our analytical effort began with what we called the "target budget." Let's say in the fall of 1980 we would begin the budget that would apply to the year 1982-83. That way we would be dealing with what's important, not in terms of how much money we have and how we're going to divvy it up, but what's important and how much is it going to cost to do what's important without regard to the ultimate limit on the total amount of funds available.

We then used that target budget, let's take my 1980 example, that when in the spring of 1981 we learned what money would be available for 1981-82, we used the priorities established in the '82-'83 target as a basis for distribution.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

DOUGLASS: You were in the middle of talking about the budget situation.

LEARN: For 1981-82 then, when we found out what our total package was going to be, we would make decisions about how that package would be distributed on the basis of the planning we had done for '82-'83. I got into some trouble with some members of the faculty and some students on the grounds that we did not consult with them to the extent we perhaps should have.

DOUGLASS: Do you mean in terms of where monies were going to go?



LEARN: Of where the money was going to go after we found out what the total was going to be. The total almost always was less than we had hoped it would be. And I said, "Yes, we did consult with you. We consulted with you about what the priorities were for 1982-83. We're assuming they're the same priorities that we should use for '81-'82. So, you can judge after the fact whether or not we allocated in accordance with those priorities, but the decision on how we're going to divide up a pie is not something that you can make in a democratic or an advisory process. That's a decision that the chancellor and I will make based upon all of the advice, all of the input, and all of the consensus we've developed regarding priorities as it relates to this planning process."

That overcame what I think is a major weakness in most budgeting processes where the battle becomes a political one over who can get a bigger slice of the given size pie.

DOUGLASS: When you say political are you talking about just within UC Davis?

LEARN: Within the campus.

DOUGLASS: We haven't talked about the outside, or other pressures that come upon making decisions about the budget.

LEARN: I am talking solely about the distribution of the money that's available to the campus and there, as I say, what we did was we attempted to concentrate on putting most of our budget thinking into this "target



budget" rather than into the budget for the immediately forthcoming year.

DOUGLASS: Did you ever get into situations where there was a real conflict between what students and faculty thought regarding money going for specific programs?

LEARN: Real conflict is hard to define. There was always conflict among people who thought we should be doing more of this and less of that. I suppose the biggest problem I had with faculty was their perception that more money that was derived from extramural contracts and grants should go back to the people who "earned" the money. My argument was that we tried in our budgetary planning process to take into account what the needs of various disciplines were and to allocate accordingly from the money we had. [I'm referring here to administrative overhead charges which are utilized within the university under the name "opportunity fund."]\* Thus, the extra mural overhead money, it's known as the opportunity fund, was essentially money that was given to the campus to meet high priority needs that were not capable of being met within the budget process itself. I argued always that we should be free to use that money in any way that was in the best interest of the campus, that the people who

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\*Dr. Learn added the preceding bracketed material during his review of the draft transcript.



thought they earned that money were already rewarded in the normal budgeting process if they had a legitimate need for the funding.

DOUGLASS: Regarding the development of ethnic studies programs and placing money in the best interest of the campus, you mentioned that you and the chancellor talked to all these different groups, but that ultimately it was up to him and/or you to decide where the money goes. How did you deal with those types of pressures when allocating monies towards those types of programs that they were trying to develop?

LEARN: Ethnic studies is a good example. Systemwide had made some money available to us specifically earmarked for ethnic studies programs.

DOUGLASS: Was this in the early 1970s?

LEARN: Yes. This was, as I recall, '70, '71, or somewhere in there, when they made the first allocation. One of the things that the ethnic studies people argued for was that that should be divided equally among four programs--we had the Native American, Asian American, Chicano and Black studies. I remember one meeting I had with representatives of all those groups. I said it should be divided equitably, which is not necessarily equally, because there were vastly different numbers in each of the four groups and we were not going to have enough money to do all that anybody wanted. What we should do is see that we do a reasonably fair job of meeting the needs of each group. The other thing that we did regarding ethnic studies was very early on decided



that we were not going to be limited by whether or not we got money from systemwide. As a result, we built their needs into the campus budget process so that if the systemwide money ever disappeared we would have them covered. It would be taken into account along with other priorities. We would never be in the position of saying to these people, "Systemwide did not give us any money, therefore we can not fund you this year."

DOUGLASS: How did you determine the amount of funding that went for each program?

LEARN: It was not nearly as scientific as I would like to believe it should be. It was done partly on the basis of pressure, partly on the belief that there's a certain core of money--each group had to have money to operate an office, a coordinator, or I forget what we called them, and a secretary, something like that--so there's a base amount that each group would have to have. Then the rest was based in part on the number of faculty, on the number of students, and part of it just pure judgment.

DOUGLASS: You just said part of it was pressure. Where was the pressure coming from?

LEARN: From faculty and students from each of these groups. Now the other thing that I think this campus did wisely--and I can't take credit for it but I was a part of it; I don't know that any individual deserves credit-



-was that we never created departments. We had programs for each of these.

DOUGLASS: You mean in ethnic studies?

LEARN: In ethnic studies. [University of California] Santa Barbara, as I remember, created a Chicano Studies department. This created an administrative entity without a program. They created the department even though they did not have a program and courses. I think that just created frustration.

We said, "Hey, we think we need to place some emphasis upon Chicano Studies and the needs of Chicano students, but Chicano students coming here are not all going to be Chicano Studies majors. Some of them are going to want to become historians. Some of them may want to become mathematicians. What we need to do is make sure that we have role models for these people, that they have a gathering point, that they have a program they can look to. But, we are not going to create a department." And I think we were wise in that regard and I think over time it's been proven wise.

DOUGLASS: Why do you think that that was the better decision?

LEARN: First of all, we were able to hire Chicano faculty, for example, which is where I think we had our greatest success. We were able to hire Chicano faculty who, for example, were first of all good historians and could make the grade in the University of California as an historian.



But could also be an historian with a strong interest in representing and being part of improvement of the university's acceptance of and service toward Chicano students.

In the early seventies we had a particularly strong group of Chicano faculty, who I think did a great deal of service both for the university and for their disciplines but also for the Chicano community, improving the climate of the Davis campus to serve those students and their needs. I think we did it in a way that was better than would have been the case had we created a Chicano Studies department that emphasized strictly an academic program for Chicanos per se.

DOUGLASS: If I understand you correctly, you had allocations from the UC level, but within the budget for UC Davis you set up allocations so that there would be funding for these programs indicating more of a commitment than might have been the case otherwise.

LEARN: Right. If we could finance that with monies specifically earmarked from systemwide, fine. But if we didn't get that money we would still finance it.

Also, because of Chancellor Meyer in the position allocation decisions, we set aside a certain number of positions that would be allocated for Chicanos, for Blacks, for Asian Americans, for Native Americans, but these would be positions that would enable us to hire



those individuals in whatever disciplinary department they happened to fall in. In other words, if the history department could identify a good Chicano historian, they could come to the vice chancellor of academic affairs and say, "We want to hire this man. Have you a position that can be assigned for this purpose?" That's how we handled that in those early years.

DOUGLASS: You talked about this link between planning and budget, setting priorities, and developing the budget. Beside the pressures within UC Davis as a public institution you had to deal with the regents, the governor, and the legislature. Regarding state funding in those early years when you first started, what impact did Governor Reagan, for example, have in terms of how you were developing your budget?

LEARN: One of the beauties of the University of California is that this kind of pressure is absorbed for the most part at the systemwide level. You don't get a great deal of pressure at the campus level to dictate how you use your money. That's essentially a presidential office responsibility.

We had some problems early on related to agricultural research and the perception--and probably a correct perception--that we were unduly influenced by agribusiness and we were not doing enough for farm workers. We got that both from students and from some external forces. One of the ironic features of this was, I can remember one



year [early seventies], I was in the legislature in a hearing, the university was taking its lumps because we relied too much on state money; we were not getting enough of the financing of agricultural research from the agricultural industry. We should make greater efforts to get them to finance their own research.

It was either the next year or two years later I was over at a hearing in front of the same committee<sup>1</sup> and the complaint was that because we were receiving all this money from the industry they were dictating what we put our research on and we should not let them dictate the priorities of our research. So that you couldn't win. Either you weren't getting enough money or you were letting their money dictate what you were going to do.

But I suppose the greatest problem we had with Mr. Reagan was his perception that somehow or another we were inefficiently or ineffectively managed and that if we managed the university the way a good business was managed, we would get much greater bang for the buck. We had audit after audit after audit trying to find all the wasteful ways in which we were spending our money unwisely. This has been one of my pet peeves. A university is not a business. We don't have a profit and loss statement. We don't even have a product

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<sup>1</sup>The committee was either the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee or Ways & Means.



whose quantity you can measure very well. We're dealing with creative people. I characterized this one time as more like managing an artistic activity where you have to play to the independence of your main employees--the faculty--you've got to give them freedom to be creative and you can't put them in a bureaucratic strait jacket as you might in a General Motors assembly plant, or something of that nature.

DOUGLASS: What did you do in response to this?

LEARN: Whenever we had a chance we tried to explain to alumni and to legislators the nature of the university. I tried to explain how we did minimize the amount of money going into, say, physical plant. I remember I got in trouble one time because I testified we only washed our windows once a year and I did not think that was adequate, but given our priorities we would rather have dirty windows than larger classes. And a senator told me, well, obviously we didn't know how to run the place and he'd come over and help us. But I don't think you can ever totally answer those types of complaints. I think it's one of the reasons why constitutional autonomy is so important.

I also take some pride in the fact that in the fifteen years I was there, very few audits of the university were done by the state in which the Davis campus was not included because we were so close. We were almost always the pilot campus. I do not recall a single audit that found a major deficiency either in our operations or in our



funding activities, and I think that's a real credit to people like [Robert P.] Bob Kelleher, for example, who managed physical plant. It's a real credit to [Richard] Dick Frost and [Robert E.] Bob Padden who handled accounting and budget, and so forth. I think we were, over all, an extremely well managed campus in large measure because of the quality of the people we had.

DOUGLASS: I want to return to this issue of the pressures regarding funding. You used the example that arose when the state said to get more money from agribusiness to do research and then, vice versa, the problem of saying you're getting too much funding. In addition, students and faculty at various times voiced the opinion that there was too much influence from agribusiness. What was your reaction to those accusations that agribusiness had too much influence through the funding?

LEARN: I think to some extent agribusiness has had an undue influence on agricultural research spending here and throughout most of the land-grant system in this country. I think we have an obligation as administrators and as faculty to try to set our own sense of priorities and use agribusiness funding wherever we can get it to finance those things, but to make sure that the priority setting is done within the university, not by forces external to the university. Now in many of my talks to faculty and others inside the university I have made quite



an issue of the fact that constitutional autonomy doesn't mean you can ignore the public interest. I think you constantly have to be testing what is it that the public wants from the university. But the university, if it is to be a true university, has to weigh that public interest judiciously and to set its own priorities.

I suppose I first came up against this in the planning of the health sciences at Minnesota because Minnesota had taken great advantage of the availability of federal funds to finance medical research. But in the process they had distorted the balance within the medical school and it was influencing the nature of their academic program, not only in research but in teaching as well. So I argued very strongly that our planning there had to be planned in terms of what is important, irrespective of the source of funding, then use those sources of funding to help you get to where you want to go rather than saying money's available, let's go get it and do whatever they want us to do. I have the same feeling about the campus here.

DOUGLASS: With regard to Davis, there were people bringing up these issues about farm labor at various times, like the early 1970s. How successful do you think Davis really was in being judicious in using the funding?

LEARN: I think we made some important changes. I think it began with Chancellor Meyer who was then Dean Meyer as reflected in the change of the name of the College of Agriculture to the College of



Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. He was ahead of most universities in this country in recognizing the importance of the environment and its interrelationship to agriculture. I think this carried over when Alex McCalla was dean, and I know he had some difficult sessions with members of agribusiness who thought he was paying too much attention to environmental issues and not enough to increased production, and so on and so forth.

I think we were able to create an awareness of some of these broader issues that a university should be calling to the attention of the public. I don't think we totally changed our bias, if you want to put it that way, in favor of production agriculture. I think, for example, we provided far less leadership than we should on water issues in California. I think there are a number of issues of that type where we could have provided more leadership, but I think we have been better than most universities in trying to adapt to the changing public perception of what are the issues of greatest importance requiring research.

I got in trouble from time to time referring to faculty members as public servants. They don't like to hear that. But we are. We're a public university. We have an obligation to serve the public. But we're a special kind of public institution in the sense that we've been given an independence, a freedom to determine what it is the public



needs from us that no other public funded activity receives. With that comes a terribly great obligation to use the freedom wisely. We can't simply thumb our nose and say, "Look, we're constitutionally autonomous. Don't tell us what to do." I think universities get in trouble when they start behaving that way, and I think we've gotten in trouble because we've behaved that way. But, I think for the most part we have been responsive and, I hope, responsible.

DOUGLASS: Continuing with the budget, what was the biggest challenge for you in dealing with it?

LEARN: If you look at it over a span of fifteen years, I think the biggest challenge was the fact that in virtually every one of those years we received less money after taking into account the increase in workload and the increase in inflation than we had the year before.

DOUGLASS: Does increase in workload tie into the increase in the campus size?

LEARN: Right, increase in the student enrollment and so forth. For example, the medical school was growing throughout this period. The medical school is extremely well funded. Well, it gets large amounts of money per student compared to the rest of the campus, so our total budget went up quite a bit, but in terms of what we needed to do the job it did not go up at all. It went down.

DOUGLASS: How did you deal with that?



LEARN: By constantly reminding people of the need to become more efficient in what they do, more effective in what they do. By constantly reassessing where the needs were greatest and trying to make the money flow in that direction. By constantly trying to let legislators and alumni, and the public generally, to become aware of what our true needs were relative to what we were really receiving.

DOUGLASS: How did you work with the legislature on that? Maybe there's a specific example you can think of.

LEARN: Largely, again, through the President's Office. One of the strengths of the California system is that the legislature deals with the university largely through the President's Office. But the best example I can give I came across in the calendar the other day. This was the question of family practice in the medical school where the chancellor and I went over and we met, I think, with six individual legislators to try to assure them that we maintained the strong commitment to family practice. This was after the chair of family practice had resigned.

DOUGLASS: When was this?

LEARN: Oh, '78, '79, something like that. But for the most part our dealings with legislators were either bringing them to the campus and talking with individual members of the legislature, of being a part of the university team who testified, or of making the representations to systemwide that they in turn conveyed to the legislature.



[Interruption]

DOUGLASS: You were talking about the budget and the difficulties in trying to deal with the budget situation.

LEARN: I think the most valuable contribution we made was in this business of trying to be totally open and above board in the budgetary planning process, that is that process where we tried to relate plans to budget looking ahead two years, and then to try to be as open and above board as we could on what was done with the funds in any given year so that people could compare what we had done with what we had said were the priorities.

The problem with budget is that to fully understand the budgetary aspects of the university, and certainly a university of our complexity, one has to deal with it almost daily, and nobody who has other responsibilities is capable of devoting that amount of time. I know some things I've learned as a faculty member is that members of the faculty felt I was constantly overwhelming them with numbers in order to prevent them from asking difficult questions. I like to think that wasn't my purpose although that may have been the consequence. The problem is that understanding the budget process is a very, very difficult task that no faculty member is capable of achieving without putting much more energy into it than they should. What I think they



LEARN: should be doing is constantly hammering away at what should be the priorities, what's important in what you do.

DOUGLASS: For that college or department?

LEARN: That college or department, or for the campus as a whole. And then questioning whether or not the flow of funds tends to reflect that sense of priority. In that paper<sup>1</sup> that I gave you I tried to illustrate how we went about doing that.

Now, the area where we had greatest control over our spending is the reg fees and student affairs. There we had a very active committee that met, depending a little bit upon the committee, at least once a month throughout most of the school year and looked at various activities. The committee provided us with, I think, very good input on how we divvied up that amount of money. There we had almost total say. There were guidelines set down by the regents, but we knew how much money there was going to be and we could divide it within the campus.

Overall I think students were generally accepting of what we did although student government, for example, thought they should have total say over that money.

DOUGLASS: Can you give a specific example?

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<sup>1</sup>Elmer Learn, "Relating Academic Program Plans to Resource Allocation at the University of California, Davis," November 19, 1981.



LEARN: Yes. The best example I can give you is the building of the [Recreation] Rec Hall. We decided in 1970--this was the second year that I was here--that the campus really needed a new gym/recreational facility. This had been on the books for ten years or more and was to have been jointly funded from registration fees and from state funds. It was obvious to me that we were never going to get state funds. In fact, the state building program for universities essentially had ended by 1970. So we sought to determine if we could build a recreation hall solely out of campus funds. We knew we were going to continue to grow up until the mid-eighties. We also knew that there were certain economies to size and economies of scale in student service activities, so that as we got more money with additional students not all of that money would have to go to counseling, or to intercollegiate athletics activities, or to what have you, that we could take some of that growth money and dedicate it to this capital program. So, we elected then that we would build a recreation hall out of our own money.

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

LEARN: And we started to set aside money. As I remember we were going to set aside a half a million dollars a year for the building of Rec Hall. We held widespread meetings on the campus. We got the support of



the reg fee committee. We got the support of ASUCD [Associated Students of the University of California, Davis], and we went ahead and began to plan the rec hall. As I remember, we went out for bids in fall of '73. We had planned a building that would cost about four and a half million dollars.

It turned out that we could not have picked a worse time in this century to have decided to build a building because that was the height of the oil crisis. The bids came in at more than double what we had anticipated. To the credit of Chancellor Meyer we elected to proceed but not with those bids. We went back to the drawing board and agreed we were going to go ahead and build it, but we would supplement the registration fee funds with a fundraising campaign. I think one of our sources of great pride is the Recreational Hall that now exists and which we dedicated in 1978.

DOUGLASS: Was there any reaction from students in terms of their money going towards Recreation Hall?

LEARN: Yes. There was some resistance at first. I remember having to meet with ASUCD one time to discuss the problem. Then we got solid support. A year after that I was called before ASUCD to explain why it wasn't already constructed. Two years later after we had gone out and received bids, ASUCD wanted to change its mind and not support Rec Hall.



DOUGLASS: Why did they first decide to support it?

LEARN: Different group of students. That's one of the things you have to learn in administration is that every year or at least every two years, you have to reeducate the student body. That the carry forward of knowledge from one generation of students to the next is not very great. I noticed they're discussing now on campus the possibility of annexation. Well, in the fifteen years I was there we discussed annexation at least three different times because each generation of students has to learn as if there had been no history. This was particularly serious during the seventies when the student motto was, "Don't trust anybody over thirty," so that any institutional memory was meaningless as far as they were concerned. We had to convince them even though we may have successfully convinced their predecessors. And I had real trouble with this with the reg fee committee in trying to get them to understand that really important things in the university rarely happened within one year.

DOUGLASS: Who made up the reg fee committee?

LEARN: It was a combination of students and faculty, about, I think, eight students and four faculty, if I remember correctly.

DOUGLASS: You just mentioned that you had difficulty convincing the students on the reg fee committee what the priorities were in terms of where the registration fees would go.



LEARN: It varied from committee to committee, but they would generally do a review, either an intensive review of three or four activities in any given year, or a more summary review of all activities to find out what student perception was of the services they were getting, how important each activity was. Student health service was always a major issue because it absorbed, at one time, about 40 percent of all registration fees. Athletics also was a major reg fee responsibility.

One of the things that I was particularly proud of and I didn't have anything to do with--it existed before I came here--was that when I first came here we spent as much money on intramurals as we spent on intercollegiate athletics. And I thought that was a particularly healthy sign. And that, incidentally, was one of the factors that caused us to push the Rec Hall. One of the interesting characteristics of the Rec Hall building was that its main purpose was not, was not, to support intercollegiate athletics. It was to support intramurals and free recreation.

DOUGLASS: How did that decision come about?

LEARN: Through consultation with students, with reg fee committee, with ASUCD.

DOUGLASS: That that was what this building was going to be?

LEARN: That's right. We had three priorities in that order, intramurals and free recreation. Second, intercollegiate athletics. And third, general



campus events such as commencements, rock concerts, and so forth. But the instructions given to the architect were to meet those needs in that order. If something has to give, it's intercollegiate athletics or it's the acoustical treatment rather than giving up space available for intramurals. You'll see that in the way seating is designed in the Rec Hall. Virtually all the bleacher seats fold back so that we have a totally free space. Unlike most universities that have an emphasis upon intercollegiate athletics, the floor is there for athletic purposes but the seats take up a major part of the rest of the building.

DOUGLASS: Is there anything else you want to add about dealing with the budget of the campus that we haven't discussed?

LEARN: Let me give you one other illustration of our process. Particularly after the passage of Proposition 13 we had serious problems in setting priorities and in trying to convince people that we were following those priorities. I had prepared a paper with the help of budget staff and others on what our priorities would be, and teaching always was at the top. We took a cut in '81 or '82--I don't remember which year, and it's probably not important--but I had really shaved particularly physical plant and administration. When I went to meet with the Senate Committee on Planning and Budget for the following budget cycle one of the things they told me was, "If there's any increase in



funding we want to see you increase the amount of funding for janitorial services."

DOUGLASS: Why was that?

LEARN: Because we had cut it so badly that the faculty perceived the lack of janitorial help as interfering with their ability to do their teaching and research as effectively as they should. In one sense I treated that as a compliment. I had told them that we can't simply say, "Teaching is first priority and therefore we cut out everything else before we cut teaching." I said, "At some point you're going to cut administration, you're going to cut janitorial service to the point where it affects teaching." And I said, "So this is not simply a start at the bottom and work your way up to the top. You have to do a little bit in various places." I felt that we had their confirmation that we had cut janitorial services as much as we could. That's one of the first complaints you hear from faculty is cut out all that money that's "wasted" on physical plant.

So, overall, I think we tried to live by a set of priorities that put the academic functions of the university first and treated all the other activities as essentially serving that academic purpose. We tried to gain as much efficiency as we possibly could--physical plant activities and the administrative activities. But there's a limit beyond which you cannot go and we had virtually reached that limit.



One of the papers I think I gave you or one of the speeches I gave to the Spring Management Conference that I commented on the fact that Chancellor Meyer's philosophy of administration was one of a belief in thin administration, with limits limited on the number of administrators, and I think we succeeded in implementing that philosophy very successfully. But we did it in part because of the nature of the people on this campus. Most of the people, and I'm speaking here of vice chancellors, of deans, of janitorial staff, of secretaries, most of the people I perceived loved this place. They didn't treat it as simply a job and they came here with the idea each day that they were going to somehow or another make Davis a better place than it would have been otherwise. So, we got much more bang for the buck than I think you would normally get out of an organization.

DOUGLASS: Do you think that was unusual?

LEARN: Yes. I think it's very unusual. I think it's partly a function of the way this campus evolved and the kind of leadership that Chancellor Mrak had given prior to Chancellor Meyer. It's partly the small-town nature of the place. But it's partly the nature of Davis. Davis had a rather unique personality. Did I give you a copy of the talk I gave to the accreditation team?

DOUGLASS: Yes.



LEARN: There I tried to express some of that. I think it's remarkable in that sense. It's quite a contrast to Minnesota. Minnesota is a place that I think has a great rapport with the state and I think there were dedicated people, but it was a different kind of family, a different kind of institutional personality than we had here.

DOUGLASS: Why don't we stop at this point?

LEARN: All right.

[End Tape 3, Side A]



[Session 2, February 10, 1993]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

DOUGLASS: When we finished up last time we were discussing your responsibilities in budget preparation and allocations. I want to start off by asking you in retrospect what was the worst budget situation you had to deal with?

LEARN: I suspect there's two candidates. One was in the second or third year that I was here. We took an absolute 5 percent cut in the support budget--that is the dollars that paid for secretarial staff and teaching supplies and all that sort of thing--and took a slightly larger cut than that in research. We were relatively new at the game and this was difficult to accommodate to, but we were starting from what was then a relatively good base and we hadn't faced some of the consequences of growth and declining budgets over an extended period of time.

DOUGLASS: The most difficult, I think, was the anticipation of serious cuts that were the result from Proposition 13. They never came through to



the degree that we anticipated, but we had to anticipate them nevertheless.

DOUGLASS: What did you do to anticipate the cuts?

LEARN: We began widespread discussion even before Proposition 13 passed with the Senate Committee on Academic Planning and Budget Review, with the Registration Fee Committee with administrators and others. We tried to alert them to the kinds of problems that might result and the kinds of difficult decisions we would have to make. After it passed we spent the subsequent year trying to prepare a statement of priorities and the process by which we would arrive at decisions to implement those priorities. We distributed those papers fairly widely, and particularly, with the Academic Senate Committee, held many discussions. We made adjustments in line with comments we received from them and from the deans and otherwise. As a result, we were prepared if necessary to take a very serious budget cut in what would have been the summer of 1979 or 1980 and from then on. As I say, the state for a variety of reasons found itself capable of accommodating some of the more serious consequences of Proposition 13.

DOUGLASS: Was that because of the surplus that still existed?

LEARN: It was because of the surplus they had and they transferred a lot of responsibility from local school districts and from local governments



to state government. The result was that higher education generally did not take as serious a cut as we thought although we did, as I recall, not get salary increases--range adjustments--that year. I think it's interesting that relatively few people have commented upon it, but I think the serious condition of state government today, 1993, is traceable back to what we anticipated would happen much earlier as a consequence of Proposition 13. So we're now paying for it in ways that are more serious than anything we anticipated in 1979, 1980.

DOUGLASS: Not long after Proposition 13, Jarvis II, known as Proposition 9,<sup>1</sup> came before the voters. How did you anticipate what the results of that would be if it passed?

LEARN: Again, we tried to anticipate. We used fundamentally the same process we had developed with Jarvis, so-called Jarvis I or Proposition 13. We did a lot of campaigning going out and talking to Rotary Clubs and alumni groups, to create an awareness among those people that higher education and the University of California specifically constituted a very large percentage of the so-called discretionary funding of state government, that, I think, roughly 70 to 80 percent of state government expenditures are mandated by legislation and the

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<sup>1</sup>Proposition 9 would have cut personal income tax rates by 50 percent and thus would have reduced the state general fund, the source of the University of California's state-funded operating budget. Voters defeated the proposition in the June 1980 election.



only way that can change is if you change the legislation. Whereas higher education and education funding generally is something that can be decided each year on its own merits. So we were particularly vulnerable to those kind of things.

DOUGLASS: Did you campaign against Proposition 13 also?

LEARN: Not as openly. I regret that we did not. I regret that the regents did not take a stronger stand against Proposition 13. I think in part there was a belief that it couldn't pass, that we did not have our eyes open to the seriousness of the so-called taxpayer revolt. I was amazed, for example, at the number of people in the university who were favorable to Proposition 13 without any appreciation of what the potential consequences for them individually were likely to be.

DOUGLASS: Why do you think that the consciousness level regarding the potential impact of Proposition 13 was not high?

LEARN: I would argue it was a failure on the part of leadership, of the governor's office<sup>1</sup> particularly and the legislature. Legislative leaders until the last minute did not come up with an alternative--I think it was Proposition 8, and then it was too little, too late.

DOUGLASS: I think we simply did not have effective leadership on fiscal matters at either the local or regental or, for that matter, in the governor's office. We were simply not attuned to the feelings of the

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<sup>1</sup>Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., 1975-1982.



people. The people, I think, also were naive in their perception that somehow or other the "good life" that they were experiencing in California could be continued, that all of the waste in government was directed toward programs that helped the other guy and that it wasn't going to affect them.

DOUGLASS: When did you or UCD become aware of the potential impact of Proposition 13?

LEARN: I think we were aware of it fairly early on. I think we, like everybody else, had a cloudy crystal ball. I thought it stood a chance but not the overwhelming vote that it got. I thought people would wake up to what the problems were going to be. And, as I indicated earlier, I think even today the vast majority of California do not equate the present serious economic crisis that we face with the fact that its roots are based in Proposition 13 and all the changes that it brought about.

I worked on a study of the Central Valley two, three years ago where it's obvious that local governments, particularly counties, are in serious, serious financial condition due almost entirely to Proposition 13 and its aftermath.

DOUGLASS: This ties in somewhat with the problem with resources not increasing. In the previous session you talked about how in developing the budget that planning was an integral part of preparing and allocating resources. What was the main advantage of your method of



LEARN: budgeting, especially considering that resources were not rising to match the increase in workload?

LEARN: I think the advantage was, first of all, that we backed up our statements of priorities and needs as expressed in the academic plan with the allocation of resources in the budget process. Secondly, because we, I suppose one would say, were basically conservative in our allocation of funds. We did not take risks of the kind that some people would have preferred and that some campuses have done; we tried always to be in a position to absorb any unfortunate surprises that would be imposed upon us by the state or by systemwide administration. We tried always to be in a position to accommodate a cut for one year without seriously impacting the operations of the campus. And during that year, then, we would put in place the measures to accommodate the changes. So, by always looking at least a year beyond this year in our budgetary planning we bought that year of grace.

I've talked to some department chairs and others who appear to have been very appreciative and aware of the fact that while some of their colleagues were taking serious cuts they had a year in which to plan for those cuts.

DOUGLASS: Do you mean colleagues at other institutions?



LEARN: Yes. At other [UC] campuses or other institutions. That because they did not have that advance planning when a cut came down, the administration simply had no choice but to pass it on to the units, the academic departments or the physical plant units or whatever, in order to save the money.

DOUGLASS: You just referred to the fact that in doing this you perhaps didn't take risks that some people would have liked you to. What were you thinking of specifically?

LEARN: We didn't spend money we didn't have. That was one thing. We also did not allocate on a permanent basis all of the money that was available to us at any one time. For example, we abided rather religiously to a university directive that 10 percent of our faculty positions, had at all times, to be on an annual allocation basis. Now this didn't mean we didn't spend that money. It meant that we would allocate that money to a dean with the understanding that that was not guaranteed for next year. So, he could use that to hire teaching assistants, or temporary instructors or lecturers, but it would be on a year-to-year basis with no guarantee that it would continue. Fortunately, we never lost faculty positions, but we always had that flexibility there in case we did get into a position such as they [UCD] have gotten into in the last two, three years of actually losing faculty positions in the process of budget making.



DOUGLASS: Is there anything you want to add about dealing with the budget?

LEARN: I think we've talked probably more than we should. It's an extremely complicated process that to gain full understanding one has to live with it almost on a daily basis. When the press wanted to talk about budget, they were always concerned with the governor's potential allocations to the university and what it would mean. Well, while we were concerned with that we were also concerned with two other budgets. Their concern related to the budget for next year. We all had to be concerned with maintaining the integrity of this year's budget, that is, seeing that the money was spent for the purpose of which it was intended. And we were also looking ahead a year in our budgetary planning to plan for what I have referred to as the target budget. So, those of us involved with budgets were continuously dealing with budgets over a three year time period each of which differed in some way from the other. But, no, I think we've talked enough about budget.

DOUGLASS: Included among your responsibilities as executive vice chancellor was the administration of the health sciences. Specifically, now, I am thinking of the School of Medicine and the hospital. When you arrived the medical school had been in existence for about three years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Authorization for a School of Medicine occurred in 1965.



LEARN: Yes. I can't remember whether the second or the third class was enrolled in the fall of '69. I think it was the second class. I think they enrolled the first class in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

DOUGLASS: I think that is right.

LEARN: And the second class in 1969.

DOUGLASS: I can check on those dates.

LEARN: It had just started.

DOUGLASS: What was the first issue you had to deal with regarding the medical school?

LEARN: That's a good question. I suppose the first major issue that came up was the proposition for capital funding for the health sciences which, I think, was voted on in 1970 and was turned down by the state.

DOUGLASS: That was Proposition 1.

LEARN: Yes.

DOUGLASS: It would have provided funds for the school including a campus hospital.

LEARN: Yes. We got caught up in that. Let me make a correction. You said I was responsible for administration. I always preferred the word coordination.

DOUGLASS: OK.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1968 the School of Medicine accepted its first class of students.



LEARN: I was the central coordinator for health sciences programs. I was their, I guess, point of contact. This was partly to ensure that we balanced the needs in veterinary medicine, in the school of medicine and in the hospital with one another. That someone was looking at the total development of the health sciences on the campus from a campuswide perspective. It was also to try to insure, in so far as possible, integration of the health sciences with the rest of the campus. In too many universities, I think, the health sciences because of their nature are pretty much allowed to go their own way. As a result they do not receive the benefits that could derive from other parts of the campus, and the rest of the campus doesn't receive benefits from their presence. We were committed to trying to insure that that benefit worked both ways. Part of my job was to kind of coordinate and to bring about the kind of interaction that would make that possible.

DOUGLASS: What did you do to make that interaction happen?

LEARN: Well, I met frequently with the deans, and later on with the health center director, on planning of programs. I can remember a number of meetings with the deans and what was then the director of the Division of Biological Sciences to talk about the teaching of general campus students in some health sciences program and vice versa. A nutrition faculty member, for example, provided some nutrition education for medical students. I tried to bring the deans of



Agriculture and Letters and Science together with the deans in the medical school and the dean of Veterinary Medicine to cooperate in any way they could, particularly in graduate education. And then overall, I tried in managing the budgets, within the limitations that were imposed upon us from outside, to insure equity in the treatment of health sciences and general campus activities.

DOUGLASS: You mentioned that the first issue you really had to deal with regarding the medical school was Proposition 1. This had to do with the funding of a permanent facility.

LEARN: That's right.

DOUGLASS: What did you do in regards to Proposition 1?

LEARN: Fundamentally, I think, we worked with alumni, we cooperated with the systemwide administration in an effort to create an awareness among the public of the importance of health sciences training. At that time we were trying, in general, to shore up the understanding of and respect for higher education. It was at times almost a rear guard battle, even with our own alumni, trying to offset the negative press that was coming from the student unrest generally, and all the problems being faced by the university, and the negative attitude toward higher education that was presented in Sacramento at that time. My memory is weak [on this]. I don't recall how much in the way of specific meetings I held with outside groups on Proposition 1. I



remember in the subsequent proposition that I did participate in a number of planning sessions and in fact went out and gave some talks. But on that one, I think, I was too new to the whole scene to be a very effective spokesman.

DOUGLASS: How did you deal with the issue of trying to get permanent facilities especially since Proposition 1, which was to provide funding, was defeated?

LEARN: Let me give a little background first. When Dean [John C.] Tupper was appointed the dean of the medical school, he came up with an imaginative approach to developing the School of Medicine, one that, to the best of my knowledge, had not been tried before or since in this country. That was to get a jump start by housing the new School of Medicine in what were temporary facilities. We referred to them as Surge Facilities. The idea was that as the health sciences developed on this campus the medical school, for example, would occupy these buildings. When it got its permanent facilities then a nursing school would surge into those facilities, and when it went into its permanent facilities a School of Allied Health would use the surge facilities, and so on. I think there was a plan for a School of Dentistry at that time. As a result, he was able to accept the first class of medical students two years after his own appointment. That had been unheard of in medical education in this country. But it also created a need for



permanent facilities fairly early on and Proposition 1 was to provide that. Interestingly enough, the great surge of facilities construction in higher education was coming to an end in the late sixties. When I arrived we were completing Briggs Hall and the Physics and Geology Building. The Chem Addition [Annex], the law school had recently been completed, and that was the end of capital construction on the general campus, except for the Rec Hall which we funded, as we talked last time, entirely out of our own funds, until we occupied Meyer Hall in 1986 or '87. So, we went for almost fifteen years with no general campus construction. Obviously, we could not do that with health sciences construction with three new medical schools established within the university.

When Proposition 1 failed the university elected to go with a second smaller scale health sciences proposition which, I believe, was 1972.<sup>1</sup> That one passed and out of that came [Medical Sciences] Med Sci I. The interesting feature was that the 1972 proposition was to have been the first of two propositions. The second one was to be brought before the voters in '75 or '76. Unfortunately both funding and the nature of university politics became such that that second proposition was never actually activated.

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<sup>1</sup>Proposition 2 passed in 1972 and called for expenditures of \$155.9 million for health science facilities for the University of California between 1973 and 1977.



DOUGLASS: Was the second proposition going to provide funding for a second medical sciences building?

LEARN: That would have taken care of a second medical sciences building, and it would have taken care of an on-campus hospital, and it would have taken care of a building for Veterinary Medicine that would have replaced Haring Hall. Haring Hall, when I came here, was slated for conversion to use by the College of Agriculture. So, this failure to fund the capital facilities for the health sciences had a kind of domino affect on the entire campus. Vet Med [Veterinary Medicine] was to have gotten a building, I believe, in 1965 or '66. They and the campus elected not to proceed with that building but to plan for Veterinary Medicine concurrent with the planning for the medical school, which made a lot of sense. The result was they put off the Vet Med facility except for the teaching hospital until they could design an entire health sciences campus off in the area where Med Sci I and the Vet Med Teaching Hospital now are.

Strangely enough because the School of Veterinary Medicine decided to be a good soldier and to plan in a manner that was best for the state and best for the university, they never received their new building. They're still in Haring Hall. They're sharing Med Sci I with the School of Medicine and they've had to live with the consequences of that decision which, as I say, was, in any rational approach to



administration, a wise decision. But in terms of the reality of what happened in the seventies it turned out to have been a disaster in so far as the School of Veterinary Medicine was concerned.

DOUGLASS: You mentioned that you did get funding with this second proposition, which was in 1972, but that it was a smaller amount. This was to go towards building the first permanent structure, Medical Sciences I.

LEARN: Right.

DOUGLASS: But it became a problem as to the location of the building. When did you begin to realize that there would be a problem or a controversy over the location of that particular building?

LEARN: Well, we didn't realize its impact on that building until about '72, '73.

DOUGLASS: Was this after the proposition had passed?

LEARN: Yes, essentially. It was when the building began to appear to be a reality, but the genesis of the problem really began in 1970. In the fall of 1970 the first class of the medical school was starting its junior year which meant the beginning of clinical instruction. The plan had always been that the university would have a strong affiliation with Sacramento County, and like San Francisco and Los Angeles would do a substantial part of its clinical teaching in the county hospital facility in Sacramento. With Dean [John B.] Tupper's speeded up development, it was acknowledged that the Sacramento County facility would be the only facility for a substantial period of time, maybe five



years, and that after that time, even though there would be a campus hospital, we would still do a lot of teaching in Sacramento County, much the same way as San Francisco does at San Francisco General [Hospital], and Los Angeles does at L.A. Harbor.

All of this was made possible in part because of a section of the MediCal Act of 1965 known as the County Option. The County Option said that so long as a county continued to appropriate for indigent care a sum of money equal to that which they had been appropriating in 1965 the state MediCal program would fund any additional costs. And for Sacramento County this was an almost heaven sent state piece of legislation. It said that they could upgrade the quality of their care, they could accommodate the additional costs that may have been associated with the affiliation agreement with the university without cost to the county. For the university it was a good arrangement. We could get the access to a county facility for our teaching purposes with essentially no special costs associated with modifying the nature of that program.

By 1970 it became apparent that the County Option, and MediCal generally, was becoming too expensive for the state and that changes were going to have to be made. And one of the early candidates for change was the elimination of the County Option. The



county saw that and began steps to make accommodation. Such steps necessarily required action by the university.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

[Begin Tape 4, Side B]

LEARN: In December of 1970 several members of the County Board of Supervisors and the director of the county hospital sought a meeting with the chancellor, with then Vice President McCorkle, who had moved on from dean of Agriculture to vice president of the university, Dean Tupper and myself. We met at the Faculty Club. The county laid on us the proposition that if the facility were to continue and there was no County Option, there would be no choice but for the university to take over ownership of the county hospital. That was the beginning of eight years of conflict, negotiation, whatever you want to call it, with the county regarding the ownership and operation of the medical center.

We agreed to consider the issue and in early 1971 we began a series of formal negotiating meetings comprised on the university side of myself and Dean Tupper and Mr. Romulus Portwood, a representative of general counsel's office, and on the county side, the county executive, Mr. Gordon Cummings, who was both director of the hospital and the health director for the county, and their county counsel, Mr. Lee Elan. Well, that controversy over who was to own



the hospital and what programs it would contain, and so forth, ultimately culminated in the university's agreeing to take over ownership. That in itself is a long story which we may want to get into.

DOUGLASS: Why did the university decide to pursue taking over ownership of the Sacramento Hospital?

LEARN: You have to look at in the context of events as they existed at the time. We did not have a Proposition 1 so there was no prospect for university owned facilities. The county said, "If the university is not prepared to take over, we have no choice but to cut programs." And they would have cut programs in a way that would have made the clinical teaching program of the university impossible. Plus there was substantial, as I understand it, pressure from the state that because of the financial difficulties of county hospitals and the university's need for clinical facilities for its three new medical schools . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . Where were the other two, for the record?

LEARN: . . . [University of California] Irvine and [University of California] San Diego. It would be cheaper for the state to buy these county hospitals and use them as university teaching hospitals and at the same time get the university to accept financial responsibility for the implementation of MediCal and other public programs in those areas. So there was belief that this was a fortuitous circumstance. It was a way to



combine education and welfare in a way that would benefit everybody: the county, the state, the poor people, and the university.

I have said, and I still believe, when the history is written sometime in the next century, it's going to demonstrate that this was one of the most foolish decisions that the state and the university ever made. The university is not a welfare agency. It should not be placed in the position of being one. The situation is working better today than it did during most of the seventies and eighties, but I think it still contains within it the seeds of very, very serious problems that will result in either the compromise of educational objectives or the compromise of welfare objectives or, what I think has been the case, the compromise of both. We're not a welfare agency and should not be put in that position.

Anyhow, it was the university's assumption of ownership of the Sacramento County Hospital that then led many people to believe that the medical school at Davis would be vastly better as a medical school if it were entirely in Sacramento, and indeed at one time one legislator was proposing that what we should create would be "storefront universities." In other words, instead of doing all of the clinical teaching in county hospitals, and university hospitals which many people believed led to excessive emphasis on specialists, what we needed were more family practitioners. The way to get more family



practitioners was to have medical students training in outpatient clinics that could be operated in storefronts at much less cost than running a hospital.

DOUGLASS: Which legislator was this?

LEARN: [Assemblyman] Willie Brown [Jr.] was one but there were others. But all of that led to the belief that medical schools were too academically oriented and one of the ways of avoiding that would be to force the school to move to Sacramento. Obviously, this was of interest to Sacramento County politicians because it would lend added prestige to their county and also assure that the university could never pull out of the county hospital, which was a constant concern--i.e. that even after the initial purchase agreement had been made that the university did not take seriously its commitments to Sacramento County.

DOUGLASS: As time went on, it sounds like the MS I [Medical Sciences] building was something for people to focus on.

LEARN: It was the hostage.

DOUGLASS: You had all these different interest groups including faculty who were concerned about the development of the medical school and the relationship to the hospital. Once it became apparent there was a problem what did you do to handle the situation?



LEARN: We held a lot of meetings, not all of them pleasant. There was a difference of opinion within the faculty. Most of the basic scientists wanted to stay in Davis.

DOUGLASS: These meetings were composed of whom?

LEARN: Generally, faculty from the medical school, sometimes faculty from the vet med school, and sometimes with meetings with the Academic Senate regarding faculty generally.

The basic scientists, I think, generally felt that their lot would be better in Davis in part because of the very strong biological science base that already existed before the medical school ever came into being, in part because of the opportunity for interaction with Veterinary Medicine, and in part because of the belief that their own welfare would be served by close association with the campus rather than an association separated by fifteen miles.

Regarding the clinical scientists some saw the value of this academic location but many of them felt it would be much better if the entire school were in Sacramento. They thought that the dream of a campus hospital was little more than a dream. They would not see it in their lifetime. So, they would much rather have the entire school located around where they were going to practice clinical medicine, and many of them did not see benefits to be derived from association with a general campus. In fact, they saw more than no benefits, they



saw some disadvantages. The salaries were different. We, meaning the chancellor and myself, had no training in medicine, and, they believed, were unsympathetic or not understanding of their needs. They would be better off starting in Sacramento, and if they did perhaps they could develop in much the same way as the San Francisco campus has developed independent of Berkeley.

DOUGLASS: What else did you do besides have meetings with people?

LEARN: We argued the case both within the university and outside the university of the importance of the academic component of medicine and the importance of a total university campus community to insuring that that academic component received the emphasis that it should. We argued that it was going to be difficult to create a medical school of University of California caliber separate from the campus despite the fact that this had been done in San Francisco. The money was not there to do what had been done in San Francisco. We met with legislators and tried to make this case. We tried to argue the benefits for the campus of association with a medical school particularly in graduate education in the health sciences, the benefits that derive from interaction in research activities between medicine and vet med, and between medicine and the general biological sciences, and so forth. So, it was simply a series of meetings, plus, we argued, if the decision was made to move to Sacramento, a whole new planning process



would be required which would delay construction of Med Sci I at least two years and probably three or four years. Given the kinds of fiscal uncertainty that had existed for the last five years, and were likely to continue throughout the decade, the chances of not getting anything were very great.

Whether we won because of our arguments or whether we won because the opposite view was not able to generate the political support I don't know, but the decision finally was made to locate the Med Sci I in Davis, I think in part to gain the mutual benefits for medicine and veterinary medicine. In addition to that, at the time this was ultimately decided in the legislature we made a commitment that we would forego the construction of an on-campus hospital, and the words were very carefully developed as I recall, for the "foreseeable future."

DOUGLASS: Who developed those words?

LEARN: I can't say who developed them. I was the one who had to testify that that was the way we would do it. This was to provide assurance to the Sacramento County politicians that we wouldn't get Med Sci I and then immediately cancel or drop out of our affiliation with Sacramento County. It's fascinating that throughout this period at no time did I ever recall a serious conversation within the university that we would ever want to have anything other than a strong teaching program



operating in Sacramento County Hospital. We could not operate a hospital big enough to meet our teaching needs on the Davis campus, yet we had to constantly fight this mythology that somehow or another the university wanted to use Sacramento County only so long as we didn't have something here, and the minute we got something here we'd desert Sacramento.

DOUGLASS: I want to make sure I understand you correctly. UCD and systemwide then had always planned that there would be an on-campus hospital but that was not to the exclusion of also having another teaching hospital facility whether it was Sacramento County or whatever. Is that correct?

LEARN: It would almost have to be Sacramento County because it was the only other hospital with a patient mix and a patient volume of the kind that we would require for good teaching. Los Angeles couldn't operate without L.A. Harbor. San Francisco couldn't without San Francisco General. We could not have operated without Sacramento County.

When I came here the plan that Dean Tupper and others had developed called for a relatively small hospital--I think it was a three hundred-bed campus hospital--a five hundred-bed VA hospital that would be developed here, and then an affiliation with Sacramento County. So these were to provide the primary clinical facilities for the medical school at Davis.



DOUGLASS: If that was the case that these plans were there, what happened that the county became so threatened that they would be abandoned if this hospital was built on the campus?

LEARN: Well, first of all, the county I think deep down in their hearts knew that the development of a medical school at Davis had been beneficial, not only to the patients of Sacramento County but to the patients at all medical facilities in Sacramento. We had an uplifting effect on the overall quality of medicine. They did not want to see the focus of that effect transferred from Sacramento to Davis. I think they also were fearful of the arrogance of the university, if I can use that word, and that we would go our own way irrespective of what happened in Sacramento County. Also, their experience with the County Option had made them very suspicious, both of the state and of the university. This is speculation on my part but I think it's true; I think politically they said, "The way to solve this problem is to get the university inextricably tied to Sacramento County. Then we can, perhaps, shove off some of our responsibilities on the university and life will be easier for us than it would be even without the university anywhere in sight." So, they had a strong incentive to want to make sure we stayed there. Why they persisted in this belief that somehow or other we would try to wiggle out I don't know, but they did believe it.



DOUGLASS: You said, just a little while ago, that you won basically in terms of getting Medical Sciences I, the first permanent facility built on campus. But then later you said that part of this negotiation was that in the foreseeable future UC Davis would not build an on-campus hospital which was part of the original plan. What did you mean by winning?

LEARN: Winning was in the sense that from an academic standpoint--and not everybody agrees with me--but I felt very strongly that the medical school should think of its headquarters as being in Davis. I also believe very strongly that ultimately if the medical school is to develop as a first-rate institution, it is going to have to have a tertiary care facility that has a degree of independence from local welfare responsibilities. So I think sometime somewhere down the road there should be a small, perhaps two hundred- to three hundred-bed, campus hospital dealing with the most highly specialized types of treatment, working at the frontier of knowledge. Conceivably that could happen at UCDMC [University of California Davis Medical Center] and it may happen. There are many people who believe it can. I think the problems we have had in developing open-heart surgery in the Medical Center and in developing in some other areas of specialized medicine suggest that it probably will not happen or will not happen until conditions are vastly different than they are now.



At the same time, in 1972 or '73 the prospects of being able to build a campus hospital in the next ten years were nil. There simply was not going to be state funding and that was obvious to everybody. I remember we spent a lot of time discussing it with legislators and others what the words "foreseeable future" meant, and we chose those words in part because they were not very definitive. For me, foreseeable future could be five years, for somebody else it could be twenty years, but in any event it said, "For the time being the university would shelve all plans for development of a campus hospital," which we did.

DOUGLASS: When you talked about this issue of the on-campus hospital, you said that some people disagreed with you. Whom were you thinking of specifically?

LEARN: Primarily clinical faculty. There were some people on campus who disagreed with me. There were some people on the campus--on the general campus--who believed very strongly that the university would be better off without a medical school. Or if it had one, have it as Cornell has its medical school in New York City, with the campus being in Ithaca. That kind of removal of the medical school would be better both for the medical school and the campus. I disagree, but there are some people who believe that and believe it very strongly.



DOUGLASS: I take it Chancellor Meyer's vision was that it would be part of the campus . . .

LEARN: . . . Yes . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . And not separate as these arguments went back and forth?

LEARN: I don't think I arrived at any of these policy positions independently. I think we spent a lot of time together discussing and arguing various positions and points so that I think we were in total agreement on all of the policy positions that we took as a campus and that we urged the university to take vis-a-vis the medical school and our relationship to Sacramento county and so forth.

More often than not I was on the firing line although the chancellor was always available to meet when it seemed appropriate. But it was a joint decision. I think we had a very good working relationship on those issues.

DOUGLASS: Would you spend a lot of time talking about these things together?

LEARN: Yes. I don't know how we define a lot. I would say when the issues were hot we would talk about them virtually every day. One of the chancellor's characteristics was the desire not to be away from campus very much. I had no great desire to be away from campus and no good reason to be away from campus a great deal. So the result was that we were here most of the time. He was away more than I because of regents' meetings and council of chancellors' meetings with



the president, and so on and so forth. But when we were here we both got to work at seven o'clock or so, and so we would chat virtually every morning between that time when we arrived and the campus "woke up" about issues that had come up on the previous day. Frequently in the evening we would get together and then at times there would be formal meetings set up with the chancellor, myself and Dean Tupper, and others about these issues.

DOUGLASS: You touched on this several times already but I wanted to ask your reaction again. This issue regarding the permanent facilities focused on a on-campus hospital which would be research oriented. What was your reaction to the argument that the University of California as a public institution in planning this type of hospital was not serving the best interest of the California public?

LEARN: Well, I believe that there was some validity to the argument that medical schools generally in the United States, and I think this would apply to the schools at San Francisco and Los Angeles, had created a climate in which the emphasis in practice was on specialization. Partly that's due to the nature of the on-campus tertiary hospital. It's dealing on the frontier of medicine and it's the specialists who are dealing on the frontiers. The result was we were not training doctors with sufficient concern for the initial contact with patients. I developed some of this philosophy in Minnesota where we were going



through the same kind of debates. There we had created an emphasis in the School of Medicine on family practice; we were trying to generate the idea that the medical school and the teaching hospital associated with it would be at the pinnacle of a statewide system of health care. But that statewide system would depend upon a series of other hospitals with perhaps less exotic, less specialized care and would also be dependent upon a meaningful relationship between this kind of supreme hospital at the peak of a pyramid and all of these other hospitals and the family practitioners--the general practitioners--who were the first point of contact for patients.

DOUGLASS: Again, then the idea was not that one was only going to exist but there was going to be a multi-layer, or multi-connected system?

LEARN: That's right. And the Davis school from its onset had an emphasis upon training family practitioners. Dean Tupper came with that philosophy and Dean Tupper bought into the land-grant idea. He saw that one of the strengths of Davis was viewing the university as reaching out to the community, and so he became very active, for example, in the federal regional medical program which would bring faculty into contact with fellow practitioners out in the state. We started a rural nurse practitioner program. So, we had this emphasis on family practice. But, the argument for the campus hospital was that it does no good to turn out a family practitioner who knows only



the knowledge of what medicine is today. He should leave here with the knowledge of what medicine is likely to be twenty years in the future. How's he going to acquire that knowledge? He's not going to acquire it by serving in the emergency room of the medical center in Sacramento or by serving in a storefront family practice clinic. He's going to acquire that by spending some of his education in direct contact with physicians who are working at this frontier. And so you have to have that in the medical school even if you are a medical school whose primary focus is on the training of general practitioners or family practitioners.

DOUGLASS: Now in the middle of all this, I realize chronologically these things are going back . . .

LEARN: . . . Right . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . And forth because you're dealing with the contract, you're dealing with funding for permanent facilities, but also in the middle of this Allan Bakke filed a suit against the medical school charging UC Davis with reverse discrimination. The reason I bring this up is, I don't know if you had that much involvement in it, but I was wondering if you did have any.

LEARN: Most of that was handled by the point persons on the Bakke case. They were the general counsel's office, Mr. Donald Reidhaar, and Dean Tupper and his faculty, since the admission of students in



professional schools is the responsibility of the faculty of the schools. We had no responsibility for that except to ensure that they followed established policies. Centrally on the campus the question was handled quite largely by the chancellor and by Vice Chancellor [Thomas B.] Dutton of student affairs. So I was in on many of the meetings but did not get deeply involved. It's rather ironic that the day that the Bakke decision was announced by the [U.S.] Supreme Court both the chancellor and Vice Chancellor Dutton were out of town and I wound up meeting the national press.

DOUGLASS: What happened?

LEARN: Well, first of all I called home and asked my wife to bring a tie because I hadn't heard the news before I left home, so all of this hit me after I got up to the office. I spent about an hour and a half in front of more cameras and microphones than I had ever seen before in my life.

DOUGLASS: Were you prepared at all for this?

LEARN: Reasonably well. I knew the background. I knew the arguments. I did not hear the announcement so I did not have the decision in front of me. I did know that it was a five to four vote and I did know that we had made a decision very early on that we would abide by the Supreme Court ruling. The specifics of how you were going to do that was another thing. In that sense I couldn't be very specific but I



could give some of the background and our intentions were fully in line. I think the policy then employed by the medical school was probably a correct one; it certainly was close since it was a five to four decision by the Supreme Court, and it was consistent with the goals of affirmative action. On the other hand, when Mr. Bakke enrolled the following fall, I was involved in making the arrangements for his arrival and handling the press. Strangely enough, again, I wound up handling the commencement ceremonies the year he got his degree, so I was visible on the Bakke situation even though I was not a major player in the development of the case.

DOUGLASS: Why were you involved in his arrival?

LEARN: Well, the press was very much interested in this. We anticipated, and we received, some protests by minority groups, and so there were a lot of security problems associated with his initial entry into the medical school. I was involved along with Vice Chancellor Dutton and Dean Tupper and others in trying to play down, in so far as we could, the public circus atmosphere, and to ensure the safety and security of not only Mr. Bakke but the campus as a whole, trying to get by this initial rush of interest in his enrollment. I only talked to him once or twice, but from all the secondhand information I received, he handled the whole affair extremely well. He was cooperative. He did not want the publicity. He did not want the trouble. He wanted to become a



LEARN: doctor. He would do whatever we asked him to do in the interest of the campus, but he wanted, in so far as possible, to be treated simply as another student.

DOUGLASS: You said you and Thomas Dutton made a decision as to how it would be handled.

LEARN: It was a decision made the way I think we made many if not most decisions during the fifteen years I was in the administration and during the eighteen or nineteen years that the chancellor was in office. It was a group decision. We spent a lot of time in meetings, some people thought too much time. We would get the police chief and the associate dean for student affairs who was in charge of their orientation, and Dean Tupper, and Vice Chancellor Dutton, and myself, and maybe some other people from the dean of students office, and we would sit down and discuss the kinds of issues, the kind of feedback people were getting, what kind of protests that were being planned, who had contact with the protesters. One of the beauties of the Davis campus was that generally speaking protestors were very cooperative and . . .

[End Tape 4, Side B]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

DOUGLASS: You were talking about how decisions were made using Bakke as a specific case.



LEARN: So student affairs personnel would have contact with the presumed ringleaders of a protest. The police very often had contact with them also, thus trying both to protect the campus and to protect the protesters. So we generally had very good intelligence about what was likely to happen. The best way to deal with that kind of situation was to take advantage of all that intelligence and get as many minds working toward, "What's the best way to handle this." So we would meet and we would arrive at a decision, this is the way we are going to behave; this is who is in charge of the site. I very rarely would go out and be present, say, at the start of the orientation program. Sometimes Vice Chancellor Dutton might go out and be there, sometimes he wouldn't be there. Very often the police chief would be the person in charge, or a subordinate of Vice Chancellor Dutton's would be in charge, but we would be available by telephone and able to get together and decide what to do. This more or less became standard procedure in handling all kinds of sensitive issues of this type, but the decisions were ultimately the responsibility of the chancellor. Sometimes he would be involved in the planning, sometimes I would be, sometimes it would be handled at Vice Chancellor Dutton's office and he'd simply let us know what they'd decided to do.

DOUGLASS: So dealing with each issue had a unique response?



LEARN: Each issue would take on a life of its own and you would have to decide how you were going to deal with it. This one was of importance enough to the total campus that, as I recall, the chancellor was involved in some of the meetings. I was involved, I think, in virtually all of them leading up to the planning and the assignment of responsibility and the question of who was going to be there in case there was a major issue or somebody had to act for the chancellor or the chancellor himself.

[Interruption]

DOUGLASS: We were talking about the development of the medical school and the hospital, which became the medical center. Now in the late seventies problems arose with the Davis Medical Center in terms of the renal transplant and cardiology departments. This was covered by the paper quite a bit. When did you learn about the problems with the Medical Center?

LEARN: I first learned about them in the early fall of 1980. There had been an indication of some problem between the cardiologists and the heart surgeons. Dean [Hibbard E.] Williams, as I recall, told me about this and said he was looking into it and was meeting with the chairs of the two departments and trying to resolve the problem.

DOUGLASS: Is he the one who brought this to your attention?



LEARN: Yes. I also learned that the medical staff had launched an investigation, as I recall, into the renal transplant problem. This was a special committee of the medical staff to study and review it as a typical quality of care issue which was the responsibility of the medical staff both under our rules and under the state licensing rules. So I was under the belief that things were being properly looked into and being resolved. I did learn, I think it was in early '81, that the executive committee had received a report of the special committee and any problems that had existed had been resolved. I knew that Dean [Hibbard E.] Williams was still having some problems between the cardiologists and the surgeons, but he was working on that with the department chairs. And the next thing I knew, I guess, was when news began breaking in The Sacramento Bee about the problems in both heart surgery and renal transplant. I think that was in May or June of '81.

DOUGLASS: Is that when you became involved with what was going on?

LEARN: Yes. I became more directly involved. I had gone away for a week to Idaho, and I came back and the day I returned I received a call from the state Department of Health Services that two individuals wanted to meet with me regarding some problems that they had at the hospital. I said, "I'll be happy to see you Monday morning," and they said, "No, we want to see you"--I think this was on a Sunday--"today."



So they came over here to the house and told me they had been to see Director [Thomas C.] Winston, were not satisfied with the responses they got, and wanted me to take action. I said, "Well, I make it a general rule not to take action on only one side of the story and to hear the other part of it." Well, I heard them out. From then on things simply got worse and we eventually lost our accreditation. The state Department of Health Services filed a series of deficiencies. I think there were some seventy-two formal deficiencies that, without their being corrected, would lead to loss of our licensing. For a period of a year I would guess I spent anywhere from 25 to 75 percent of my time on this issue. During late July, and August, and September 1981 I met virtually every evening from four-thirty or five o'clock until whatever time it took, frequently seven-thirty or eight o'clock, with Mr. [Frank J.] Loge and Dr. [Don] Rockwell and Dr. [Ernest M.] Gold.

DOUGLASS: What were their titles?

LEARN: Loge was associate director of hospital. Dr. Rockwell was chief of medical staff. Dr. Gold was associate dean of the medical school. Each of them worked with the dean or with the director but they worked with me then in developing the responses to each of these complaints. We agreed to meet every day because things were happening so fast--they were popping up in the newspaper--that it was



the only way we could get effective communication. We all had other responsibilities.

DOUGLASS: Were you meeting also with the dean and the director?

LEARN: Yes. That was at least once a week. Very often they would join these other meetings. But generally speaking each of them delegated the day-to-day activities to these associate deans and, of course, the chief of staff had a special responsibility. Then we formalized this. You may have seen some of the documentation that we put together on the nature of the administrative structure of the hospital versus the medical school and my responsibilities. My responsibilities were fundamentally those of the hospital's board of directors. I was the board. In technical terms, I served as the board of the hospital, the individual who was ultimately responsible, by delegation from the regents to the chancellor to me, for the activities of the hospital. Part of the complaints were that the board's responsibilities had not been adequately fulfilled.

DOUGLASS: What did you think of that?

LEARN: Well, there was a degree of truth in what they said. Most of the complaints, when it came right down to it, were complaints related to documentation rather than to fulfillment of responsibilities, but from their standpoint so long as there was no documentation they had no proof.



DOUGLASS: What do you mean by documentation? Is this regarding the patient charts?

LEARN: Not so much with patient charts as with whether or not the board had received and approved this or that or the other thing. Or whether we had a documented quality of care program where specific deficiencies in quality of care were identified, were handled by the medical staff, were documented what had been done, and so on, and so forth.

Now this was related to the renal transplant, and to the cardiology and heart surgery problems because, again, we did not have full documentation that the medical staff was in fact handling this thing. In part that grew out of the special nature of a university owned teaching hospital. The medical staff is fundamentally the same as the clinical departments of the medical school. We had assumed that it was appropriate for the dean of the school to work with the two chairs of cardiology and cardiovascular surgery to resolve the patient care problems that had been identified. And I think they were attempting to resolve those issues appropriately but in the context of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals and in the context of Title 22 of the Health and Welfare Institutions Code of the state of California the medical school doesn't exist. The dean has no responsibilities as dean for patient care. So, even though Dean Williams had been holding these meetings and had been working for



over six months, as far as JCAH [Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals] and the state were concerned we had done nothing because we did not have any documentation of this being handled within the medical staff organization.

I don't think we were that much different than any other teaching hospital at the time. We simply became the target in part because of the publicity that had been given to this thing and in part because of our proximity to the state capital.

DOUGLASS: That is the main reason why you think this got out of control?

LEARN: Well, that's main reason why it became a special focus of the health licensing agency and of the JCAH. There were some quality of care issues in which we had been less diligent than perhaps we should have been. Again, I don't think we were all that different from many other hospitals.

DOUGLASS: What about the accusations that there were incredibly high death rates, etc.?

LEARN: I'm not a physician but I think many of the accusations were related to the fact that we were dealing with a very, very, very sick population of patients. In some cases, I suspect we engaged in what some people would refer to as heroic surgery. That is you might have an alcoholic with severe, let's say, liver or other problems, but also with a very weak heart problem. That the chances of the individual surviving with



no care were virtually nil. The chances of the individual surviving open heart surgery were slim but at least there was a chance. You might save that individual's life, so they operated. If the individual died he may have died from the surgery, he may have died from complications associated with some other aspect of the illness. It's hard to say. But we were dealing with a very high risk population. When you deal with a high risk population you're going to have a much higher rate of death or other complications from surgery of, say, open heart surgery or the like, than you will if you're dealing with a population comprised largely of middle-aged, well-financed individuals who are generally healthy except for the heart problem.

We tried bringing consultants and others to sort this out and it was virtually impossible to do after the fact. And as I say our records on quality of care investigation were less complete than they might have been.

DOUGLASS: Once you began to hear about the issues with the center how did you decide how to deal with the problem?

LEARN: First of all we had to respond to the statement of deficiencies imposed upon us by the Department of Health. And, as I say, we met as a group. This is the dean, the director, two associates, the chief of staff and myself. We met at least once a week. The other four of us met every day for a period of two or three months.



DOUGLASS: This is all through the summer of '81?

LEARN: Starting in July, August, September of '81.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: We then said, "OK. One thing is resolving the specific deficiencies identified by the state. The other one is getting at the heart of what do we have to do to get ourselves in topnotch condition?" So the first thing we had to do was understand the nature of the organization. I think I showed you an organization chart that we drew up . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . Right . . .

LEARN: . . . That tried to explain this and it really is complicated. I don't think we had ever thought it through. I'm not sure that anybody had fully thought it through.

Let me explain what we were dealing with by using the example of the chair of a clinical department, let's say the chair of cardiology. He plays four separate roles simultaneously. He is administratively responsible to the dean of the medical school for the teaching and academic programs of the department and the administration of the funds related to those programs. He is accountable to the faculty, the Academic Senate, or the division of the Academic Senate that is the faculty of the medical school, for the determination of curriculum, of student qualifications, of graduation requirements, and so forth within the area of specialization of his



faculty. In that sense he's truly a chair of a faculty which is a committee of the division and they have independent authority, independent of the dean, independent of the chancellor, directly from the regents. So, in the school he plays these two roles as in the academic-administrative line that flows down through the Academic Senate and in the administrative line that flows down through the president, the chancellor, and the dean for the handling of funds and space, and so on and so forth.

In the hospital he plays a similar role because there he is accountable to the director of the hospital in the same way he is to the dean of the School of Medicine for the administration of activities that go on in the hospital. But he is accountable to the chief of staff and the medical staff organization for medical care. That medical staff organization has to be independent of the administration of the hospital, so the chief of staff in his administrative authority reported to me in my role as board of the hospital rather than to the director of the hospital.

Well, first of all, I don't think any of the clinical chairs had a full understanding of these four separate responsibilities that they had to fulfill and to whom they reported on such things. The best illustration of that was Dean Williams attempting to deal with an activity that was a responsibility of the medical staff that should have



been handled entirely within the medical staff organization. The same thing is true with regard to the appointment and the review of the credentials of people who joined the medical staff. That is strictly a medical staff responsibility. But we have a very intensive academic review process that also flows through the chair of this clinical department. So, we more or less accepted that academic review as the review for determining the qualifications of an individual to be on the medical staff. Well, that's not adequate in the strict interpretation of the rules. There has to be a separate review process of the medical staff organization.

Once we grasped an understanding of that we then began to ask ourselves, "What do we have to do differently in order to become in full compliance, not only with the spirit but with the letter of these things." So, we documented all the delegations of responsibility and authority including my own as the board. We reorganized within the medical staff organization so that we did in fact have a true credentialing process independent of the medical school credentialing process. We eventually created a position of medical director--this would be an administrative position--that handled the administrative activities that were the responsibility of the medical staff organization but were incapable of being adequately handled by an elected chief of staff serving on a part-time basis. No matter how hard that individual



worked he/she did not have either the linkage to the hospital administration that was required or the time to devote to this. Fortunately, Dr. Rockwell who had been chief of staff through all of this, became the medical director.

We got some outside consulting help from an individual who was both a physician and a lawyer, and a nurse who came in and advised us on quality of care procedures.

DOUGLASS: What were their names?

LEARN: I can't remember their names.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: I could probably find them in the files.

DOUGLASS: They came in as consultants?

LEARN: They came in as consultants. I think they were identified by the hospital. I met with them separately on two occasions. They worked with the medical staff, particularly with Dr. Rockwell Mr. Loge, Mr. Winston, and Dean Williams, and Dr. Gold in setting up a quality assurance unit accountable to the medical director, and then ultimately to the chief of staff and to me, to assure that we properly documented specific deficiencies in quality of care and steps that were taken to correct any deficiencies, and so forth, and just overall sharpened up the whole function. We also held a meeting with the regents' subcommittee on hospital operations to outline for them the problems



we had encountered and the steps we were taking to correct them. There were a whole bunch of things that happened over the next twelve months. Dean Williams, Director Winston, Dr. Rockwell, and I went back to Chicago to meet with the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation to discuss with them their tentative decision to remove our accreditation. We failed, which we thought we would do, in convincing them that loss of accreditation was not necessary.

DOUGLASS: Why did you think you were going to fail?

LEARN: Because given the publicity, given the position of the state Department of Health, they were almost compelled to not accredit us. They would have created political problems of their own had they not gone ahead with this.

I will say I am really proud of the medical staff, of the administration, of the dean, all the people involved, on the way they turned to. It was a very demoralized period. There was constant reference to the hospital in the newspaper and the television, of its problems and its many, many lawsuits. I guess the happiest moment of my administrative career was probably the following summer when I went over--we had the reaccreditation review about a year after the one that led to loss of accreditation--for the initial meeting with the three or four outside reviewers.

DOUGLASS: Was this 1982?



LEARN: This was '82. I came back and told the chancellor that, "Oh, God. We're up against a bunch of hanging judges and they really are tough." I learned later that they were as frightened by this experience as we were. They had heard all the stories about our problems, and they didn't know what to make of it. They were to review for two days and then have an exit interview which I was expected to attend. The hospital called me about three hours earlier than I had originally been scheduled and said they were ready for the exit interview, would I get over there. So I went over, and, as I recall, the comments were that the reviewers simply were astounded at what has happened to this place in one year's time. In fact I talked to one of the physicians later and he said, "I really almost turned this assignment down because I had heard so many stories and I just did not want to be a part of it." And he said, "You really should be very pleased. This place has turned itself around and it's outstanding." Now I suppose the best compliment we received was either a year or two years later when Don Rockwell as medical director called me up and said, "We have a request from the Department of Health Services. They would like us to serve as special consultant on quality of care. There are several problem hospitals around the state. Do you think we should do it?"

So, I think we had some problems in documentation. We had some serious problems in communication among members of the



medical staff, between the administration and the medical staff. We had some problems in understanding the nature of our organization. And we probably had some deficiencies in the quality of our care although to this day I do not believe that we were that unusual among teaching hospitals that were dealing with the kind of patient clientele we were dealing with.

See, the patient clientele that we had were the patient clientele that the San Francisco medical faculty would deal with at San Francisco General, not at the UCSF [University of California, San Francisco] hospitals. And so San Francisco General would be responsible for any deficiency problems. We were held totally responsible because that was the class of patient we had and we were the owner, and operator, manager, of the whole thing, of the hospital.

DOUGLASS: The fact is that this did become a very big issue and the regents became involved on a certain level.

LEARN: That's right.

DOUGLASS: How did the regents respond to what was going on?

LEARN: Generally, I think quite well. The President's Office was very concerned in part over the fact that this issue at Davis might spread and encompass all the hospitals in the UC system. Interestingly enough, I think we were the only hospital where the "board" responsibilities had been specifically delegated and specifically



documented on paper, and I was told that I was more directly involved in hospital matters than central administrators at most of the campuses, so that I was more aware of issues of this nature than would be the case on many of the other campuses. The President's Office suggested that we seek consulting help from Chancellor [Francis] Sooy [University of California, San Francisco] who helped us out for a month or two when the thing first broke and was very helpful and very supportive. The regents generally, I think, were extremely concerned because they are ultimately the board, they are ultimately responsible for the five hospitals. There was no way that the Board of Regents could fulfill all of the responsibilities that a board of directors is supposed to fulfill for a community hospital, which is the way the rules are written, so some sort of delegation was essential. I think they were also aware that the problems at Davis were not all that unique except for the publicity. So, we met with them. They came here once and we made a report to them at least once during this period at a meeting in San Francisco. But I found them generally understanding and supportive, but they wanted to be informed and we tried to be as forthcoming with them as we could given the lawsuits, and all the legal and fiscal implications that this had.



DOUGLASS: When you look back at your whole time as executive vice chancellor, what was the most difficult aspect of dealing with the medical school and center?

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

LEARN: In terms of the amount of time devoted I suppose the eight years of negotiation with the county of Sacramento that ultimately ended in our full ownership of the medical center was the most enduring of the problems. Emotionally the most difficult problem was that period from the spring of 1981 to the fall of 1982. This just drained one in ways that I can't describe. I suppose there were weeks when I devoted 75 percent of my working time to hospital issues which meant that I wasn't able to devote the time to budget or to overall campus operation that I should have. Everybody pitched in and was very supportive and I think took on additional responsibilities that weren't in their job descriptions and we got through it. But it was painful. During this period I lost two very good friends. Associate Dean [Morton] Levitt died of a heart attack in early 1980 unexpectedly. And then Ernie Gold, with whom I was meeting in late summer and fall of 1981 frequently, had what proved to be a fatal heart attack. Actually it occurred on a night following one of our marathon meetings; it [the meetings] started at four and went to nine o'clock. I promised Arlene



in the fall of '81 that if I lived through this I was not going to allow myself to be in a position to ever have to be put through it again. My decision to leave administration more or less was set during that period although it wasn't actually acted upon until the spring of '83.

DOUGLASS: Was that the main reason you decided to retire?

LEARN: Well, that was one of the reasons. I suppose it was the straw that broke the camel's back. I had said when I took the job, and I had said many times in meetings, that no administrator should stay in a position such as the one I was in longer than ten years for a whole host of reasons. That I strongly believe. It's not healthy for the individual or for the organization. And I was approaching the fifteenth year. It was my twentieth year in central administration including the time at Minnesota. I was suffering from what magazine articles and others refer to as burn out. I don't think it was healthy for me or for the institution.

When you go through something like this negotiation with the hospital and then this eighteen month period of truly stressful responsibility there's a sense of, I think, what should I have done differently to have prevented it even though I never was in the operating room. I never analyzed or diagnosed a patient or quality of care problems. Were there things that I should have been doing differently? Many of the complaints, as I said, were about the



performance of governing body responsibilities which I still believe we essentially fulfilled reasonably well but we did not document. It was a difficult period.

The other stressful thing with the medical school--the health sciences--was the belief on the part of many people on the faculty that having anyone who was not a physician involved in administration of the school was unwise. There were periodic calls for the creation of a vice chancellor for the health sciences which the chancellor did not believe in and I did not believe in.

DOUGLASS: Why not?

LEARN: First of all, the health sciences have a rather privileged position within the university already in terms of funding, in terms of independence. To have a vice chancellor for the health sciences would create a separate voice centrally to argue their case vis-a-vis Agriculture or Letters and Science. I don't think there is anything in a physician's training that gives him necessarily a superior ability to handle administrative, management or budget issues over one who's not trained as a physician. I just think that is a layer of administration that is not necessary and could be harmful for the campus overall. I'm sure my ego comes into that argument to some degree and I'm sure that bothered some of the physicians. I know there were times when it would have been helpful to have a physician sitting in on some of the



meetings. I also know there were times when it would have been a disaster to have someone who was a physician. I think there was a general feeling in the medical school that problems relating to financing, relating to facilities, and relating to what have you, resulted from the fact that Chancellor Meyer and I did not understand the nature of the health sciences and therefore could not put up a good defense. I'm conceited enough to believe that most of the problems of financing, most of the problems of facilities, and in fact many of the problems related to patient care were problems which nobody could have defended from a central administrative position. It was the nature of our situation that led to those problems. It was the nature of the state's financing. Anyhow, I believe we did a reasonably responsible job of defending and promoting the development of the health sciences. I think we did it with the proper attention to the needs both of the health sciences and the campus generally. I think it would have been a mistake to have given, let's say, the health sciences a vice chancellor without considering a vice chancellor for agriculture or for what have you. It's a debatable question. Many universities have created vice chancellors of health sciences, many have not.

But getting back to the original point of this discussion, by 1983 I knew it was time for me to move on regardless. One other factor in that, in addition to the burn out and in addition to the



tremendous emotional effect of the controversy of the hospital, was the realization in 1983 that the funding situation for the university was going to look up. I had spent all of my fifteen years dealing with cutbacks in resources and figuring out how best to sustain a quality institution against those cutbacks. A world where the dollars were going to be increasing would be a new kind of world and I thought a new leadership in the whole budget area would be healthy for the institution, that it would be very difficult for me to change my style. I told somebody, "I don't know how to deal with a budget that has pluses in it." While that was a facetious comment, I think a change of attitude was needed at that time.

DOUGLASS: In addition to your responsibilities as executive vice chancellor you also became involved in the University of California and Government of Egypt Agricultural Development Systems Project in 1975. How did you become involved with that?

LEARN: There was a visit by the Egyptian minister of agriculture to the vice president of agriculture and natural resource's office and then with the dean of agriculture at Davis about the possibility of the university providing technical assistance to Egypt in the development of its agriculture. This was to be managed under the U.S. Agency for International Development under a relatively new law that would provide USAID funding but the actual contractual relationship would



be between an American university and the government of a foreign country. Our relationship to Egypt was to be one of the first programs of this type. So, in 1976 there was to be a site visit of five or six people from this campus to Egypt to look into the possibility of this and to make recommendations as to whether or not we should become involved. Dean [Allen G.] Marr of the Graduate Division was the administrative leader of this activity and Dean [Charlie] Hess of the College of Agriculture and then there were three or four others. Dr. McCalla was to be the economist on this site visit team, and for some reason he was unable to participate, and so I was asked, more or less at the last minute, if I would substitute for him and be the economist member of this committee. So, I went more as an economist than I did as an executive vice chancellor.

DOUGLASS: I see. What did your involvement actually entail?

LEARN: Well, at that time we just went over and we met with AID and Egyptian government representatives in Egypt. We met with the U.S. ambassador and with various people from the Egyptian government to discuss what they wanted and what we could contribute and how we would go about it. I participated in these conversations as an economist on questions of agricultural policy and things of that nature.

We came back and wrote up a proposed agreement--I had very little to do with that--to set up a project which AID would approve



and would finance. It would be joined in by the government of Egypt. And I think in '77 or early '78 this project was approved and it called for the creation of a governing body comprised of six or seven Egyptians and one less total American members. I was asked to serve on that governing body and in fact the highest ranking Egyptian would be chair of this policy board and I would serve, as the highest ranking American official, as the vice chair. So, my role as an economist ceased and my role as an administrator came into the picture. The day-to-day administrative responsibility was still handled through Dean Marr and the Graduate Division but when it came to our annual or semi-annual meetings of the governing board I participated as the leader of the American portion of that governing body.

DOUGLASS: How long were you involved with the project?

LEARN: It lasted only five years. AID elected to cease the financing and to finance the government of Egypt directly at the end of the five year period.

There were a number of problems with the project. We had difficulties in identifying a strong administrative leader on site in Egypt and in fact went through three individuals before we settled on Frank Child and Bruce Glassburner, and then we had some problems with direction from the campus. But I think in the last two years of



the project we were making significant progress and significant contributions for the Egyptians.

I remember a conversation I had with Chancellor Meyer after my first visit and talking about whether or not we should get into this activity. I said, "The chance of our really doing something significant is probably not more than ten in one hundred. And you're not going to see this for at least fifteen years, perhaps twenty. So, we shouldn't go into it as a short term thing. I think it has to be at least a ten year commitment on our part. But I think we should do it because the Egyptians seriously need the kind of thing we can do." We did agree from the beginning that we would go into it only if the main contributors, the main talent for the project, would come from our own faculty. We were not going to become simply a broker, hiring people to go over there under the University of California name. That took some education of our faculty, some convincing that there were benefits to be gained from this. But we did get outstanding leadership from, among them, [Harold O.] Hal Carter in agricultural economics and from [Lawrence] Larry Rappaport in pomology to lead those two sections of the activity, and tremendous participation from really distinguished members of our faculty who gave a great deal.

I personally believe that despite all of the administrative problems we were making real progress in '81 and '82 and that AID



made a serious mistake in not extending the contract for another five years. On the other hand, we did have some problems. We were slow to get started. The administration was less than perfect, and so looked at from that angle AID had justification for being less than totally satisfied. I understand that some of the things we did particularly in strawberries, some of the things we did in promoting and training of young Ph.D.s in Egypt, in getting them involved in research is continuing to have lasting benefit. So, I don't feel ashamed, but I feel disappointed that we did not accomplish all that we could have.

DOUGLASS: I want to back up chronologically here. This was not defined within the job responsibilities as a key part of your activities, but when you arrived at the campus it was a time of student activism. You touched upon this earlier when you came to interview for the dean of agriculture position. Of course, when you came the focus was on the Vietnam War among other things. What is the first thing you remember about what was happening on campus once you got here?

LEARN: I'm not sure it was the first thing but it was during the first year.

DOUGLASS: What stands out to you?

LEARN: Well, this is the one that stands out to me.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: There was a major demonstration on campus. The chancellor was in Berkeley. As had been our custom from the beginning there was



LEARN: widespread consultation as to what we should do. And the students  
DOUGLASS: took over the ROTC building.

DOUGLASS: When was this?

LEARN: It was either the spring of '70 or the fall of '71. I remember I called a meeting. We had at that time identified a group of people with whom  
DOUGLASS: to meet during major campus turmoil. There were about thirty-five,  
LEARN: comprised of administrators such as the dean of students and vice chancellor of student affairs, representatives of the academic staff organization, the University Staff Assembly, the Academic Senate. We got into a room and met, and tried to decide what we should do about the takeover. And I got a lot of good ideas and the original conclusion was that we'll let them stay. They're peaceful, they're not doing any harm. One of the ironic things was I was taken aside and cautioned that I should be careful of the colonel, the officer in charge of ROTC, he was a hardnose and . . .

DOUGLASS: . . . Who took you aside? . . .

LEARN: . . . Oh, some other member of the administration. I don't remember who it was at this time.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: Anyhow, I should be careful because he was a hardhead and could create real problems if left to his own devices.

DOUGLASS: Was this Orrin Tracy?



LEARN: No, this was Colonel Kirkbride.

DOUGLASS: Max [V.] Kirkbride.

LEARN: Right. Then someone else counseled me that I should be cautious of the dean of students. That he was a "touchy feely" type who would let the students get away with anything.

DOUGLASS: And who was that at the time?

LEARN: That was [Ivan] Van Richards. And I should be cautious because, God, they could destroy the campus and he wouldn't do anything. But I also was being given lots of good advice on what to do. It turned out that Colonel Kirkbride served coffee and cookies to the students, and sat down, and seminared with them about the issues of Vietnam and so on and so forth. Things were very peaceful. In fact, I talked to the student body president afterwards and I said, "What did you think of Colonel Kirkbride?" He said, "Well, he was OK, but I wish he hadn't patted me on the head and called me son." [Laughter]

Anyhow, it went on. They stayed there all day. I was in touch with Chancellor Meyer by phone, "Should we move them out?" [He said,] "Well, they're not doing any damage, let's see what happens." We were buying time. So, I called a meeting then at seven o'clock that night of this same group to get together and decide what we were going to do, should we leave them to stay there all night, should we get them out. There were all kinds of safety considerations that we had



LEARN: to take into account. We had met for about an hour, strangely enough Colonel Kirkbride and Van Richards both came in to see me. Colonel Kirkbride was arguing "Let them stay." and [Laughter] Van Richards said, "No, we've got to enforce the rules." So, here were these two guys that I'd been warned about taking just the opposite position.

DOUGLASS: What did you do?

LEARN: Well, I sat there and kept this meeting going and we kept discussing it, and I looked at my watch and it was about a quarter to eight. [I thought] we've been here for forty-five minutes, my God we're going to have to bring this thing to an end, at eight o'clock I'm going to make up my mind. About five of eight some student burst into the room and said, "They left." [Laughter]

DOUGLASS: You did not have to make a decision?

LEARN: I don't know to this day what decision I would have made. As I say, there about thirty of us in this room about evenly divided that we should move in and get them out or we should let them stay. I don't know. I've been asked many times, "What was your decision?" And I hadn't made it. I don't know what it would have been. I would have made it at eight o'clock. I had made up my mind that we couldn't wait much longer.

DOUGLASS: How else did student activism affect you directly?



LEARN: In those first three to four years it was a constant threat. You worried about it all the time. It was a rather sad commentary on American academic life that at no time, I suspect, were more than 10 percent of our students actively involved. And yet administratively we probably devoted five times as much energy to dealing with issues associated with that 10 percent of the students as we did with the other 90 percent of the student body.

DOUGLASS: What was your role in dealing with student activism? Was it defined?

LEARN: It wasn't, no. We had an assigned chain of command of who could issue authority to clear a building or to notify people that they should be off campus, and I was second to the chancellor in that chain of command. As I was indicating with regard to the Bakke situation, we tried to work as a team involving as many people as was practical in discussing the situation, the alternatives, the intelligence we had about what the intent was and what our capability was. You have to remember at that time we probably had at most sixteen policemen on campus. The town may have had thirty. The sheriff's office may have had another twenty. But that was what we had in the way of force. There was no way that even fifty armed police could deal with a crowd of four or five thousand students and faculty, and non-campus people who were here trying to be troublesome. So we tried to work as a group. If the chancellor was on campus, he typically was the



individual to whom we would turn before any explicit action was taken. If he wasn't on campus I was the one. I was almost always involved in meetings with the dean of students, the vice chancellor of student affairs and chief of police, and others in talking about actions that we thought were going to happen or actions that were underway; we didn't always know. I frequently would be the one who would issue the final directive, "We're going to do this or we're not going to do that." But it was almost always a result of consensus. I think the illustration I gave you regarding the takeover of the ROTC building was a good example. The decision was mine. The vice chancellor of student affairs was there, the chief of police was there, the dean of students was there. Colonel Kirkbride was there. If we were going to move them out, I would have to make the decision. The chancellor wasn't here. We did agree that the decision had to be made by people who were present who could sense the situation. Even though I consulted with the chancellor, I had to make the decision.

DOUGLASS: What did you think of the students' activism?

LEARN: What most people did not understand is that the students, generally speaking, were not aiming at the university or at the university administration. They were unhappy with the state of affairs, and we were hit. They couldn't petition the White House. They could petition the governor's office, and they did it from time to time, but we were it.



We were representative of the establishment for better or for worse. A good share of the activism was an attempt to let off steam and attempt to be heard, to feel that they were having an effect.

Looking back on it I suppose I am more sympathetic to their concerns than I was at the time. I've learned much more about the whole Vietnam picture than I knew then. I still think a lot of the things they did were wrong. I think the scariest situation was the one we had, I think it was after the Cambodian invasion, when the students first [Inaudible] called on Mrak Hall and then decided they were going to shut down Interstate 80. Later they decided to shut down the railroad tracks. At that time I was in communication with a number of the leaders and tried to convince them that, "Hey, I understand you don't want violence and we don't want it. But you don't know what can happen when you get two or three thousand people." And I said, "No matter how committed you are to no violence there could be a disaster and our job is to try to prevent that disaster. We're not opposed to your expressing your views. What we're opposed to is anything that could lead to harmful consequences." "Oh, we won't let that happen." Well, when I think of those kids going out and lying on Interstate 80 and what might have happened had a truck driver with a tire iron decided he was going to take things into his own hands, or



LEARN: the kid that almost got hit by the train, it really makes you kind of shudder. We were described as being marshmallows.

DOUGLASS: Who described you as that?

LEARN: Oh, alumni and others who thought there should have been harder action. The chancellor and I talked about this, and, I think I learned this idea first from President Wilson in Minnesota, that there's nothing wrong in being marshmallows. Often times when you're dealing with things of this nature what people want is something to bounce their ball against and if you give them a hard wall it's going to bounce that much harder. If you give them a marshmallow it's going to land and drop with a thud. We openly talked about our being marshmallows, to take the bounce out of the ball. Now it made us look soft. On the other hand, with the ROTC case we could have said they don't belong in here, they're trespassing, move them out. That's exactly what they would have wanted. We would have inflamed the situation. By not doing that, by Colonel Kirkbride serving them coffee and cookies, and sitting down and talking with them, he took that opposition away from them and it kind of fizzled.

The other thing that I remember about this period is one time they took over Mrak Hall and this was a total surprise. We had no intelligence. I was in a meeting and they invaded my office.

DOUGLASS: This was April 15 [1970], I believe.



LEARN: Right.

DOUGLASS: Because it was around the time of the ROTC incident. But they came into your office as well as Chancellor Meyer's?

LEARN: Yes. And we were trying to figure out how to deal with this, and there were two or three with an armband on--there were kids all over the place--and I got one of the leaders who I happened to know and I said, "What's the deal with this armband?" He said, "Oh, that's a group of us who have decided that we are sympathetic to what the protesters are doing, but we want to make sure they don't do any harm. So, if you ever need any help, grab one of us with the armband and we'll help you out. But we're not here to create problems, we're not here to get rid of them, but we're here to make sure that nothing bad happens." And that was true in every major protest we had. We had a group of concerned students, many of whom were very liberal, who were very much committed to the activist cause, but were even more committed to the Davis campus. And that made life bearable and made one proud of this place.

DOUGLASS: Had they organized within themselves then?

LEARN: Someway they did. I was never fully aware of this. To give you an illustration there was one of the other protests when a group from Berkeley were up trying to get this campus more actively involved and

...



[End Tape 5, Side B]

[Begin Tape 6, Side A]

LEARN: A couple of student leaders saw an individual working on the edge of the crowd and they didn't recognize him. They decided this is one of the troublemakers and so they decided they'd keep their eye on him. They followed him around for an hour, an hour and a half, during the night I think it was. It got dark and they kept following him, and something happened, and the guy broke into a run and they took after him and tackled him. It turned out he was a police officer.

[Laughter]

I suppose there was no place during that era in higher education that it was fun to be at, but Davis was a rewarding place to be at. Another anecdote. One time we had a takeover of Mrak Hall and the students left, oh around six o'clock, and several of us were out sitting on the front steps of Mrak talking to some of the ASUCD officers and some of the leaders of the action about issues of the day, and so on and so forth, and this was a good conversation. It went on for quite a while. Eventually one of them looked at his watch, and this was about as hippy and liberal an individual as you could possibly get, he said, "Oh my God. William F. Buckley is talking over in Freeborn. I've got to go hear him." [Laughter]

DOUGLASS: [Laughter] When was this, do you remember?



LEARN: This was in '71 or '72, somewhere in that period. But there were many times when we would be caught up in problems of meeting with students or of students taking over Mrak Hall and it would break up. I would start for home at six-thirty or seven o'clock and drive on the west side of campus and the intramural games would be going on as if nothing happened. That's why I said it was 10 percent getting all the attention and the other 90 percent living their lives as they normally would. It's not that the other 90 percent weren't concerned because if it became a mass issue such as several of the town meetings that were held on the quad, it was easy to get five or six or seven thousand people to show up and express their concern. But the real problems, the takeover of buildings and that potential threat of harm to buildings or to individuals, were coming from a very small percentage of the student body. The rest of them were simply concerned with their country and their university.

DOUGLASS: You mentioned in the first session that when you arrived at the campus Dr. Meyer was evolving his role and he was thinking about what the executive vice chancellor's role would be. You said that you evolved together in a way and that there were advantages to that, but you also specifically said that the two of you hit it off in terms of philosophy towards higher education management. What did you mean by that?



LEARN: I suppose the main thing is that management of an academic institution requires a certain sense of commitment, of ability, and of attitude. It's more than the kind of thing we look for in the chairing of, let's say, an academic department where the department operates quite democratically in making basic decisions. There are some managerial questions of assignment of space and of the use of budget, and so forth, that are important, but many of the basic issues are done democratically. That carries forward the operation of the campus as a whole but the management takes on, proportionally, much greater responsibility. I think we were both very much of the opinion that management is important. It requires a commitment on the individual to management per se as opposed to academic leadership alone that is extremely important. I think we both have a strong sense of academic values. I think we both believed that those values had to influence the kind of management and administrative decisions we made. But I think we both were also committed that we had to dedicate ourselves to being managers--managers with a sense of academic values--rather than academicians with some commitment to management.

DOUGLASS: Chancellor Meyer is credited with establishing an organizational structure which focused on decentralization of decision-making. Were you involved in helping Chancellor Meyer to develop this matrix management approach?



LEARN: I can assume no credit for the concept of the matrix. The idea of participatory management is one that appeals to me. I think the idea of intensive consultation before making decisions appeals to me. I suspect I'm more of a believer in the traditional pyramid type of organizational structure than Chancellor Meyer. I think if we disagree on anything I think we, when push came to shove, we observed the pyramid more than we did the matrix in the sense that decisions flowed still from the department chair to the dean to the vice chancellor to the chancellor kind of thing and the same thing in the administrative area of activity. What I think we did was we used the matrix as a way of defining who should be involved before that decision is made.

DOUGLASS: Did that help you to set priorities?

LEARN: It's how we set priorities. It's how we decided, let's say, on whether we took people out of the ROTC building or not. The ultimate decision, as it would have been within the traditional organization, was my responsibility. But I did not make that decision without bringing into the picture all the people that a matrix type organization would require. The system of work groups that we had was defined largely by the matrix organization. But I used to make quite a point of the fact that if there is an advisory committee the chair is responsible for bringing the committee to some kind of consensus, but he reports the



decision of the group rather than his or her personal feelings. In a work group there's only one vote and that's the chair's. Now a good work group leader won't take that vote until he's heard from everybody. But it's his responsibility and he's going to be held accountable, not the people sitting in the room with him. So, that's the way you link the matrix to the pyramid. The responsibility for the expenditure of money was with the chair of the work group, but the decision as to how it should be expended, generally, was made after getting input from all the members of the work group.

DOUGLASS: The fall conferences are another example of Chancellor Meyer's management approach to encourage communication between individuals from various levels of the campus. How effective was that conference in promoting communication?

LEARN: I think it was extremely effective. I think it and one other thing are two of the most important things we did, particularly during the years of student unrest.

DOUGLASS: What was the other one?

LEARN: The other one was the vice chancellors' and deans' luncheon. Let me deal with the conference first.

DOUGLASS: Sure.

LEARN: Here again the chancellor and I had minor disagreements. He spent a great deal of time worrying about what the program of the conference



was going to be. Who the speakers were going to be, what the topics were going to be, and so forth. And I really was not that involved. First of all, he did that so I didn't worry about it. Secondly, in my mind that was not the most important part of the conference. The important part of the conference was the opportunity for that group of individuals who were going to be more or less the leaders of the campus for the coming year to get to know one another as individuals rather than as vice chancellor, or as president of the student body, or as whatever. And time and time again examples of that came up when we would have one of these tense situations. When I, let's say, would come in contact with the president of ASUCD, it was not as if we were meeting for the first time and he came with his president's hat on and I came with my vice chancellor hat on. We did, but each of us also came there as Joe and Elmer and we couldn't talk to one another without having that Joe and Elmer relationship come into focus.

DOUGLASS: Is that what the fall conference provided?

LEARN: The fall conference provided that. It accomplished that ability of people to get to know one another as individuals in a time of no crisis so that when they had to deal with a crisis with their leadership hats on they still knew who they were as individuals and you did not have this separation that you might otherwise have. And I think it paid immeasurable benefits, particularly, say, up to '75, '76 with students.



It was amazing how much more open we could be with one another than we would have been. The same thing is true between faculty and administrators, and between faculty and students. So the fall conference played a tremendous role.

DOUGLASS: How did the vice chancellors' and deans' luncheons help?

LEARN: OK. Incidentally, I was opposed to this when they first started so I can't take any credit for it.

DOUGLASS: Why were you opposed to it?

LEARN: I just didn't think it would serve any purpose. It was to be a no agenda luncheon. There were to be no substitutes. If you were out-of-town that day, let's say you're a dean of agriculture, agriculture wasn't represented. For that reason there was no agenda because you did not solve any important questions. But amazingly enough attendance was very good. It would be an opportunity, for example, for the chancellor to report on what went on at the regents' meeting or issues that were discussed at the COC [Council of Chancellors] meeting that did not require action but kept the campus informed. I could bring into that a budget question that I'd picked up in the Capitol or had picked up in University Hall, "It looks like such and such is going to happen this year, we need to begin thinking about it." Or the dean of medicine would come in and talk about a problem he was having and the dean of L and S would say, "Oh, gee. I didn't



realize you had problems like that over there." It created a camaraderie and a sense of family among the central leadership of the campus that I don't think existed on any other campus in the system. I think it led to our ability to deal with tough questions when we had our formal meetings once a month where we did deal with issues. We were able to deal with them much more openly, with much less petty bickering. I used to say that the dean of L and S would hear the dean of medicine discuss some of his problems and say, "My God, am I glad I'm not in his shoes." rather than come up with the idea of, "Boy, am I jealous of all the money he has relative to what I have." We became a team. It really was, I think, a very good institution. There would be times we would come in there and not a single issue that related to business would come up. But we'd laugh, we'd joke, we'd kid one another. It was good.

DOUGLASS: How did the spring conference fit into this management structure?

LEARN: The spring conference was more a device to deal with the second and third levels of management and to, one, reinforce their awareness that they were part of the total management structure or management team as it were, and, two, to try to enhance their understanding of management issues being faced by the campus and the role that they might play in helping to resolve those issues. It was a larger group of



people. It was aimed in part at getting to know one another but it had a training function to it, I guess, is the best way to say it.

DOUGLASS: How about the UC Management Institute because you mentioned that to me when we met for a preliminary interview?

LEARN: That was the chancellor's innovation. Harvard has for years run a management institute for the training of university administrators and we had had some people attend that. But the chancellor came up with the idea it would be much better if these people had formal training, but training in the context of issues they face in the University of California. So, he proposed to the President's Office that we should have a UC Management Institute where each campus could send "x" number of managers and they'd bring in experts on budgeting, or what have you, for training. He ran it here for two or three or four years and then it was transferred to Irvine.

DOUGLASS: Were you involved at all with that?

LEARN: Only as a speaker.

DOUGLASS: OK.

[Interruption]

DOUGLASS: What was it like to work with Chancellor Meyer?

LEARN: Overall it was a very enjoyable experience. He was an individual who had a commitment to the job that would be hard to match. I used to say that he put the job and family as his highest priority, but he did it



in that order. He brought with him his background as a farm boy which meant he started early. I always enjoyed being the first person in the office in every job I've ever had and there were times when that became a challenge with Chancellor Meyer.

DOUGLASS: What time would he be there?

LEARN: Rarely later than quarter after seven, frequently earlier than that.

DOUGLASS: When would you come in then?

LEARN: I tried to get there by seven, sometimes six-thirty. Sometimes he'd beat me, but usually I was there first. And he would stay late. We rarely left the office before six o'clock at night.

He, as I say, was almost single-mindedly focused on the job. I think he was excessively concerned with his own presence on the campus. I think it would have been helpful had we spent a little more effort toward participation in statewide and national affairs that would have added to the visibility of the campus around the state and nationally.

Chancellor Meyer did not get any satisfaction out of socializing unless there was a purpose. As a result, he rarely went to anything simply to "fly the flag." Unless there was a purpose for his being there, he wasn't there so that we did not travel very much, either one of us. I am not particularly good at that sort of thing. I enjoy the day-to-day operation so I didn't mind, but I think one of us should



have been visible more frequently than I think we were at both national and statewide activities.

He was outstanding in his willingness to delegate to me budget matters. I felt totally secure in being able to say no to somebody with the understanding that unless there was an extremely good reason for it, I would not be countermanded and that if there was a good reason for it, it would be discussed with me before any action was taken. In that sense I was able to fulfill my role as budget officer in ways that individuals in my position frequently are unable to do because of interference of the man above.

He was honest to a fault. I don't think it ever occurred to him to do something simply for show. One of the, I think, unfair raps that he got was that he wasn't as open to students and faculty as Chancellor Mrak was. I didn't know Chancellor Mrak as chancellor, I knew him afterwards. I think he was a wonderful man and the kind of man who just in meeting with students or in meeting with faculty almost made it a public event. He was his own best publicist so that to the extent that he had an open door; it was well-known. Chancellor Meyer would go out and meet with students in dormitories half a dozen, a dozen times a year and nobody would ever know it except the students with whom he met. It never dawned on him that this was something that deserved publicity or anything of that nature. He was very



forthcoming with students. He at times would say things that I'd want to shudder about, that he would not have had to lie not to say them, he just would not have to say them.

DOUGLASS: Can you give a specific example of that?

LEARN: I can't think of one right now but I know there were times when he'd comment on something that I would think it's better that that's not publicly known. But, I don't think anybody ever questioned his honesty or his integrity.

DOUGLASS: What type of leader do you think he made for the campus?

LEARN: Overall. . . . Let me preface that with a statement. It's interesting to me how many times institutions are led by leaders who are right for that time. Chancellor Mrak, for example, seemed to me to be an ideal leader for the ten years that he was chancellor. It was a growth period. They needed a folk hero, or one who clung to the traditions of the past, and who really was a very good spokesman for the campus, an excellent one. I think Chancellor Mrak would have had a horrible time dealing with the problems of student unrest and budget that we had in the seventies and eighties. I think in that sense Chancellor Meyer was superb.

I think he was superb in his commitment to planning. His constant desire to look down the road five years from now and anticipate the problems that were going to be there then rather than



unduly worrying about the problems that we were going to face tomorrow morning. He relied upon me, upon the deans, upon the other vice chancellors to take care of that, but he wanted to be thinking about and then he wanted to get us thinking about what's going to happen five years from now and how are we going to prepare ourselves for that. So, his constant emphasis on planning, I think, bothered some people on campus. They didn't see any purpose to it. I think a good share of the credit for our ability to not only survive but to grow in a qualitative sense during the period from '69 to '86 was a direct result of this constant attention to anticipation of issues and then a willingness to be innovative. I think we talked about the Work Learn Program, the Stop-Out Program, and these kinds of things that were counter to the established view of what's right. I think his leadership in the College of Agriculture to move into the environmental sciences five years before that became a nationwide phenomenon is a good example of that.

I sense that it was a generally happy team. He and Lorena and I had a relationship where we shared ideas. We could disagree. We sometimes disagreed rather strenuously. He believed in a lean administration which had both its plus and minus side. There were times when I chafed at the idea that I did not have my own secretary and at the fact that because he had been accustomed to Lorena



opening all of his mail, Lorena opened all of my mail. There was one person who kept our calendars so that we were interchangeable.

I think the campus gained a lot of cost saving out of that and a lot of efficiency in administration. It was rare that either one of us would be faced with an issue that the other one had dealt with where we were totally without knowledge of what had gone on. Either one of us could be away from the campus and the other one could pick up essentially without losing a beat.

DOUGLASS: Was that achieved because you met together frequently?

LEARN: I think we met together. I think Lorena in one sense formed the common link. She saw all of my mail and all of his mail so that if one or the other of us were gone she could fill us in if something puzzled us about what was going on. We also had the practice of circulating correspondence folders among all the vice chancellors so that all of my outgoing mail showed up and all his mail showed up in a folder that circulated among all the vice chancellors, and the same for the other vice chancellors, so that we did not have to have a central filing system for all of central administration. But it kept us informed. If the vice chancellor for academic affairs was having a problem with, let's say, a department over some promotion or something, we would get word of that by reading his folder.



DOUGLASS: You've mentioned several things that comprised your day. For example, you tried to get there at around six-thirty or seven in the morning and wouldn't leave until 6:00. You were going to vice chancellors' luncheons. Could you summarize what a typical day was like for you?

LEARN: I guess the best answer to that is there was no typical day.

DOUGLASS: OK.

LEARN: Generally speaking I would arrive somewhere between six-thirty or seven and would use that time to catch up on correspondence that I hadn't dealt with the day before, and to prepare, if necessary, for meetings that were coming up. Invariably I would spend anywhere from five minutes to several hours on . . .

[End Tape 6, Side A]

[Begin Tape 6, Side B]

LEARN: . . . An issue that we were dealing with. I also during that period would invariably spend some time chatting with [F. Edwin] Ed Spafford, John [L.] Hardie, [Robert] Bob Downie, who was assistant to the vice chancellor of student affairs. [Robert E.] Bob Chason now fills that role. They would almost always stop in my office. Frequently it would be nothing more than to say hello but often times we would deal with an issue. Other people would stop in so that the period from the time I got there until eight or eight-thirty was



frequently taken up with informal chitchat. I rarely had any meetings scheduled before eight. But from eight or eight-thirty on a typical day was comprised at least 75 percent of the time with scheduled meetings of one form or another, frequently back-to-back, most of the time in my office which is one of the things I disliked. I used to periodically go out to Joye and say, "I've been here too much lately. Schedule my meetings or schedule some of my meetings for the next two weeks at the other guy's office so I'm forced to get out of here and come in contact with people." The problem with that is you waste fifteen minutes going and coming. I would guess that, let's say, 75 percent of the time taken up with scheduled meetings, the remaining 25 percent of the time I would guess 10 to 15 percent would be with meetings that could not be anticipated but somebody would call up and say, "I've got to see him," or, "I've got to talk to him on the phone." or something like that. And maybe 10 percent of a given day would be free to catch up on the mail or prepare for something down the road. That percentage may be in error. I doubt if there was ever a day when less than 50 percent of my time was scheduled.

When I went into administration I was very intolerant of administrators who could not return phone calls. I said nobody is so busy that they can't pick up the telephone. There were days when student unrest was at its peak when there were times when I would go



for as long as three days without an opportunity to read the mail or to return a phone call no matter how important. It just wiped all of that off your desk and you dealt with the crisis that was in front of you. Now fortunately that did not happen often, but it happened at times.

As I say, typically the chancellor and I would chat early in the morning and we would usually chat, again, depending upon the day and the issues, five, ten, fifteen minutes, a half an hour between five and six or between five and six-thirty or something like that.

DOUGLASS: What did you like about the position?

LEARN: I suppose more than anything else it was being at the center of all of these things that were happening and believing that what you did somehow or another made it come out for the better. I suppose in one sense that's a feeling of power. There were frustrations galore. I used to comment that one of the most nerve-racking aspects of administration is you're never able to say, "It's over and I did this." You don't know whether you did it, or someone else did it, or whether it happened in spite of what you were doing. So, it's not like writing a paper and finally getting it published. In doing that there's a sense of accomplishment. I told somebody when I was coming back to the department that one of the most frustrating aspects of administration is you very, very rarely get that thrill of accomplishment that you get in teaching when you complete a quarter or that you get in a research



project when the article is finally accepted for publication. You don't get that in administration. First of all you never, or practically never, do anything on your own, it's always the input of a subordinate or of a team that's working together. You're just the one who signs the paper. Furthermore, even when something is over, such as the accreditation thing at the Medical Center, there are fifteen other things on your desk that aren't over. You can spend all of five seconds patting yourself on the back that you've finished this one before you are immediately placed into a position of frustration because you realize that, "Yeah, but I've got all these other things that I haven't accomplished that I can now get at."

I guess what I liked was the being at the center of things and of appreciating the people you work with. When I left the job a lot of people said, "Don't you miss it?" And I said, "No. I don't miss the job. I miss the people." We had a remarkably congenial, dedicated group of people at Davis. I'm including everybody from the janitor and the groundspeople to the vice chancellors. If I were to get into a contest where I had to say, "Who did you resent?" there's only two or three people who I can say ever really gave me grief in my position. I get great satisfaction out of being waved to by members of the grounds staff or members of the janitorial staff who knew me when I was vice chancellor and see me and feel obliged to say hello.



This team work that evolved in the vice chancellors' and deans' group was really a wonderful experience compared to Minnesota where there was lots of petty bickering among that group of people. We really were a remarkably congenial group of people. Even when I did some of the most dastardly things to them in budgets or in enforcing the rules I rarely had deans who took it personally and attacked me personally. I think lots of times they disagreed with what I did, but they recognized it was my responsibility to do it.

DOUGLASS: Looking back at your career as executive vice chancellor what do you think were your achievements, do you think?

LEARN: The one that I take greatest pride in and that I probably don't deserve credit for was the speed with which and the quality with which we reacheived our reaccreditation at the Medical Center. I said in a commencement speech at the School of Medicine in one of my final appearances that the most remarkable thing about the School of Medicine in its first fifteen years or so is not its accomplishments per se, although those have been many, I think it's the fact that it has survived. I think the hardships imposed on it by the state and by systemwide and by the conditions at the time were really severe. I think it is a quality program but the mere fact that it survived is worthy of acclamation.



I guess the other thing I take a real sense of satisfaction in is the Rec Hall. I think early on we made the decision that we were not going to get it with state funds and we had to figure out a way of doing it, and we did it. There's never a time that I go into that place and I do not feel very proud that it exists. I think students today can't understand what it was like before we had it. We were starting intramural basketball games at one o'clock in the morning before the Rec Hall.

DOUGLASS: Were there any disappointments?

LEARN: Yes. The biggest one is the failure to get the Center for the Performing Arts off the ground. I had hoped and had believed that I had started one. . . .

DOUGLASS: Now a committee that you were chairing was organized in '81?

LEARN: '81 or '82. And I thought we had things set up. I had identified eight million dollars that would have been available as seed money and anticipated that even though we were talking about a big project that ultimately would cost forty or forty-five million dollars that it could be done in stages. I made a speech one time where I said, "Everyone said we couldn't do the Rec Hall and we did it. By the same token I think we can plan on dedicating the first phase of the Center for Performing Arts by 1990." Obviously I was wrong. Now I don't



know if we'll ever see it. We'll see it sometime but probably not in my lifetime.

DOUGLASS: Is there anything else that was a disappointment?

LEARN: I think overall the failure of Davis to receive widespread recognition within the university, within the state, and particularly within the nation for the quality institution that it is. I think that that is explainable in a lot of ways. The most important of which is that we placed heavy emphasis upon maintaining quality undergraduate education while growing into a multi-purpose graduate research university of high rank. I think we achieved it. I think that we are in the top twenty to thirty. And I would argue that we're probably within the top five multi-purpose graduate universities in term of the quality of our undergraduate education, or we were when I left. I think that's a credit to Chancellor Meyer. I think it's a credit to the faculty at Davis, to the whole Davis mystique. But the quality of undergraduate education at Davis does not get recognized in any general sense. There aren't national studies of the quality of undergraduate education and within the university, and within the state, and particularly within the nation our whole emphasis upon the measurement of quality of universities is heavily biased in the direction of graduate education and research. As I say, I think we're in the top thirty, perhaps the top twenty of American universities in those two categories. I think it's a



mistake for us to ever try to be in the top ten. I don't think it's a mistake for us to strive to be the graduate multi-purpose university with the best undergraduate training on the West Coast. And I think we were that. I think that the accreditation teams' comments suggest that's true. I think we have good balance, but anyhow I wish we'd had that recognition and we still don't have it. I think. . . . Well, I'll stop there.

DOUGLASS: You mentioned a couple of times about the role of the administrator within the campus and the uniqueness of the university setting. How important do you think it was that you had a background in agriculture to your role as an administrator?

LEARN: I don't think agriculture is the key although certainly given the history of the Davis campus an understanding or an appreciation of agriculture is important. I think an understanding of the land-grant mission and all that that implies was extremely important. As I think I said earlier, I'm a land-grant baby almost from the time I was born so I've had little experience outside of that.

To some extent I think my background in agriculture was a detriment. There were some people on campus who resented the fact that the top two administrators were both trained in agriculture and the campus was becoming increasingly general in character. I like to think that that was a criticism that was misplaced, but it may not have



been. But I do think that a meaningful appreciation of the land-grant heritage and all that implies was extremely important.

DOUGLASS: You just brought up the Davis mystique again. In the first session you talked about Chancellor Meyer's philosophy of administration was a thin administration and that in great part it was successful because of the nature of the people on campus and they saw it as more than a job, and you credited the campus, the town, Chancellor Mrak and again the nature of Davis for this. Why do you think UC Davis has or had this quality?

LEARN: Well, partly it's the way it grew. It was the farm campus. It grew in the shadow of Berkeley and acquired a meaning of its own. Partly it's the small town. Partly it's the willingness to be looked upon as small as a source of pride rather than as a source of division. Why, I don't know. I think you have to go back and study the people who have had something to do with Davis and what influence they had.

DOUGLASS: The campus has grown and is not a small campus any longer but it seems to have retained that quality. Why do you think that it has?

LEARN: Well, there was an article in the paper by Lynn Loughlin in the Enterprise the other night where she was bemoaning the fact that Davis, as a town, is always going to be stuck with sprawl because they refuse to think of themselves as an urban community, and that's to some extent the nature of the campus. We refuse to think of ourselves



as a big university. I think there are forces now trying to do that. There's some resistance. Maybe ten years from now, fifteen years from now, we'll think of ourselves as one of the big universities. We haven't. And that's partly, I suppose, an explanation as to why we haven't received the recognition we should have received in part because we didn't work at getting it. I think I may have commented earlier, one of the characteristics of Davis is our contentment with being Davis. We don't want to be judged against some other institution's standards. We want to be judged against the standards that we set, we establish. Why, I don't know. Why is Davis looked upon as a kind of a "farm" campus within the total system at the same time that, when I came here at least, many of the administrators throughout the entire UC system sent their children to Davis? We were an extremely popular campus among the sons and daughters of chancellors and vice chancellors throughout the system. I don't know that you can ever explain why the personality of an institution is what it is. I think you can just describe what it is. I tried to do that in the talks with the accreditation team many years ago, and in some talks that I gave subsequently. The accreditation team had a paragraph in their report that I have quoted many times, you've got it in some of the materials, I can't remember the precise words, but it captures the essence of what Davis was at the time I was serving as an



administrator very well, in beautiful language. I hold that paragraph up as a source of pride.

DOUGLASS: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you can think of that you would like to talk about?

LEARN: There are thousands of things that we haven't covered but I think I have talked more than enough.

DOUGLASS: Thank you very much Dr. Learn.

LEARN: Thank you.

[End Tape 6, Side B]



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**NAMES LIST**  
 Oral History Program  
 Center for California Studies  
 California State University, Sacramento

Interviewee/Narrator Elmer Learn

List Compiler/Interviewer Susan E. Douglass

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	PAGE INTRODUCED
John Walter Learn	Father	Learn	1
Naomi Ruth Warner	Mother	Learn	1
Jacob Learn	Brother	Learn	2
Elinor Learn Smalley	Sister	Learn	2
Harriet Learn Slamp	Sister	Learn	2
Vell C. Holcomb	Furniture Dealer/ Undertaker	Learn	2
Pierson Holcomb	Furniture Dealer/ Undertaker	Learn	2
Richard Holcomb	Furniture Dealer/ Undertaker	Learn	2
Vell B. Holcomb	Furniture Dealer/ Undertaker	Learn	2
M. E. John	Professor, Sociology/ Penn. State	Learn	11
George Brandow	Professor/Penn. State	Learn	12



Willard Cochrane	Professor, Economics/ Univ. of Minnesota	Learn	14
Les Hurwitz	Professor, Economics Univ. of Minnesota	Learn	15
Arlene Green Learn	Wife	Learn	15
O. B. Jesness	Professor, Ag. Econ. Univ. of Minnesota	Learn	17
Percy Lowe	Professor/Univ. of Minnesota	Learn	17
O. Meredith Wilson	President/Univ. of Minnesota	Learn	20
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Alex F. McCalla	Professor Ag. Econ./ UCD	<u>UC Dir., '69-'70</u>	32
James H. Meyer	Chancellor/UCD	<u>UC Dir., '70-'71</u>	33
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Robert E. Padden	Budget Officer/UCD	<u>UC Dir., '81-'82</u>	58
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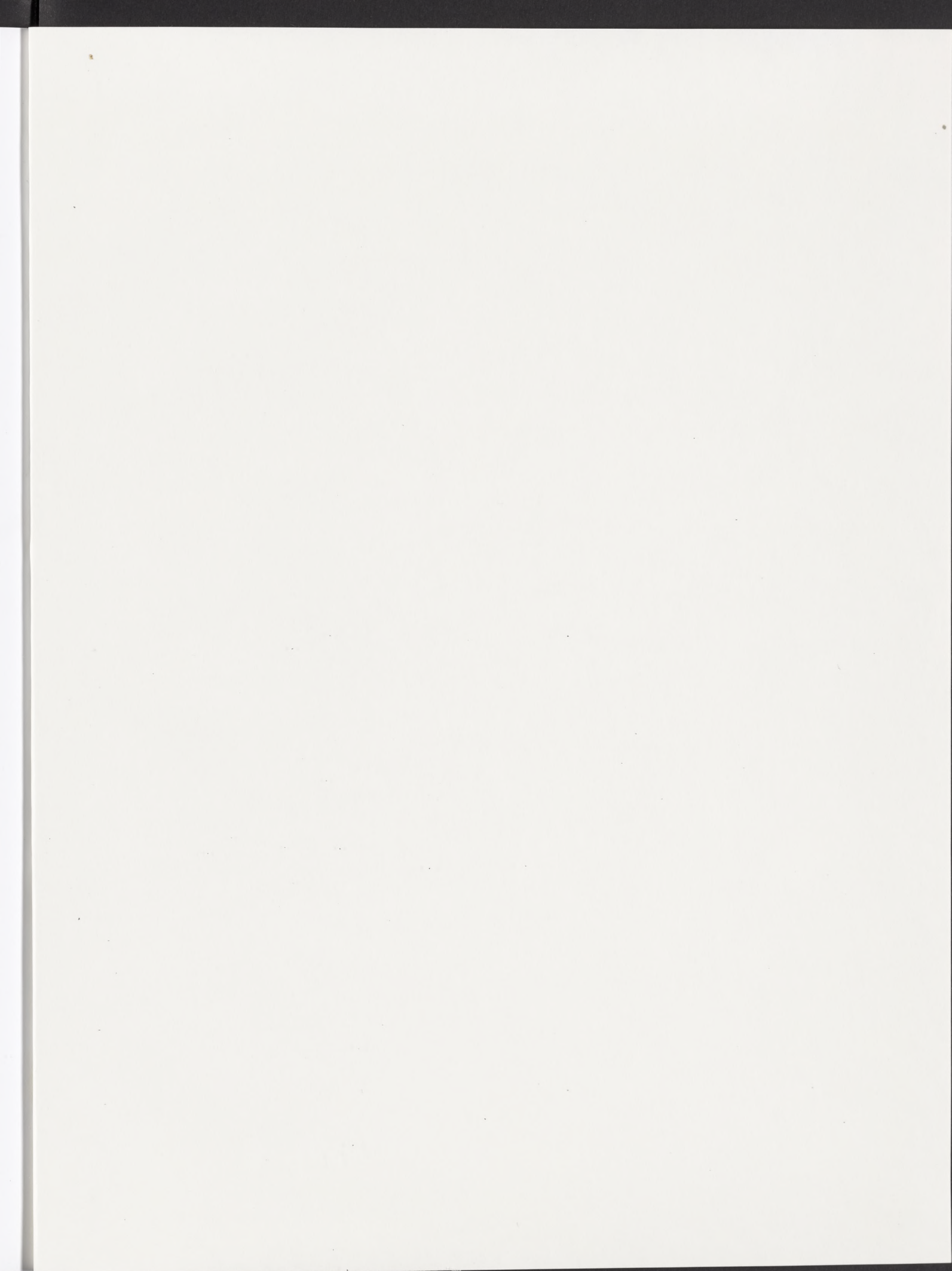


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Harold O. Carter	Professor, Ag. Econ./	<u>UCD Dir., '91-'92</u>	130
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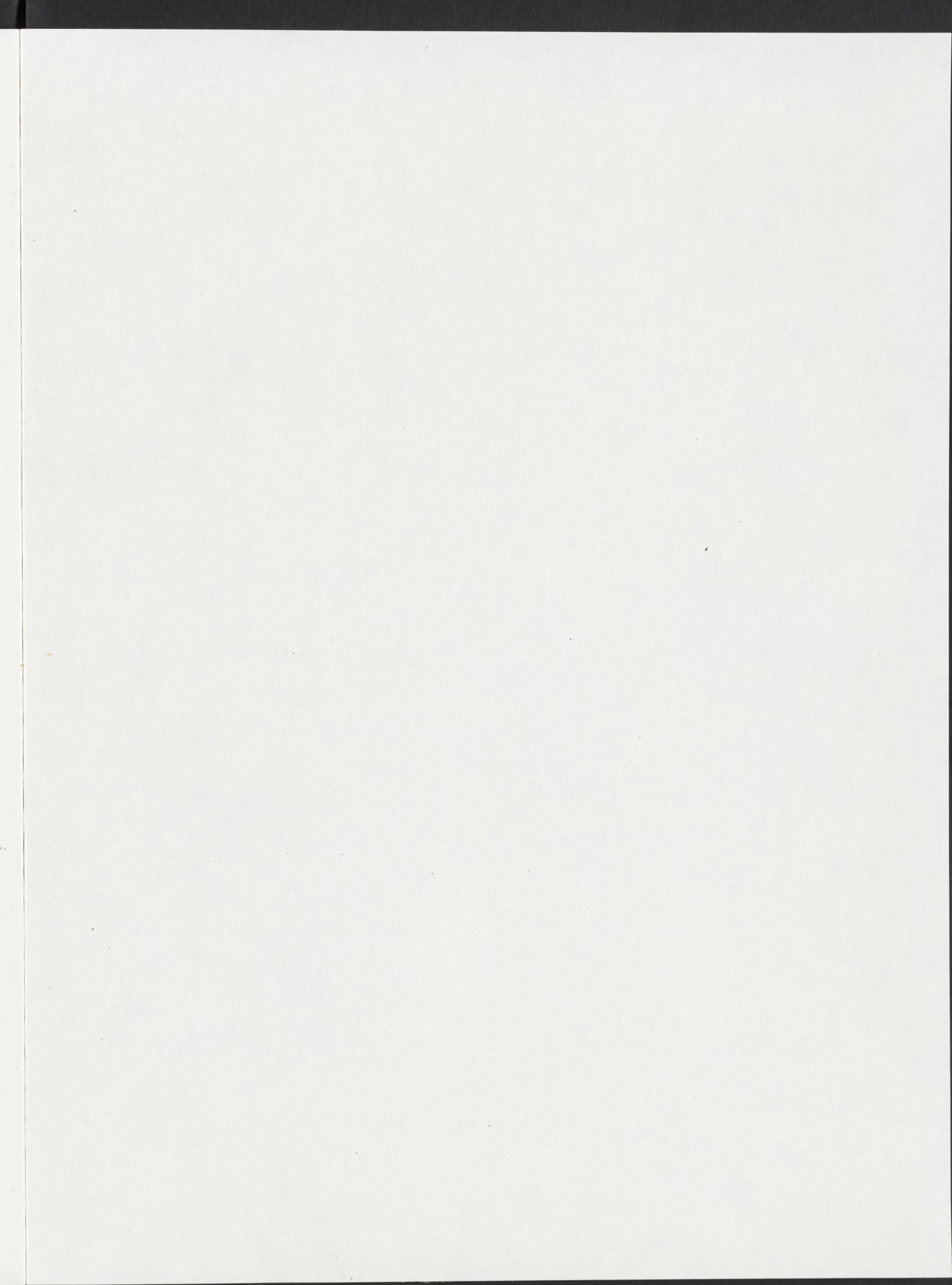


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Robert Downie	Ass't. Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs/UCD	<u>UC Dir., '74-'75</u>	154
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CAL-NA BINDERY

1930 20th St.

Sacramento, CA 95816

(916) 452-4355



